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JUDITH SHAKESPEARE

JUDITH SHAKESPEARE

A Romance

BY

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JUDITH SHAKESPEARE.

CHAPTER I.

A HERALD MERCURY.

The distance between this luxuriant garden, all radiant and glowing in light and colour, and the small and darkened inner room of the cottage, was but a matter of a few yards; yet in that brief space, so alert was her brain, she had time to consider much. And with her, pride or anger was always of short duration—the sunny cheerfulness of her nature refusing to harbour such uncongenial guests. Why, she asked herself, should she take umbrage at the somewhat too open neglect that had just been shown her? Was it not tending in the very direction she had herself desired? Had she not begged and prayed Quiney to give Prudence the little spaniel-gentle? Nay,

had she not wilfully gone and buried in the churchyard the bit of rosemary that he had sent her to keep—putting it away from her with the chance of its summoning an unknown lover? So now, she said to herself, she would presently come out again to the poor affrighted Prudence, and would reassure her, and congratulate her, moreover, with words of good cheer and comfort for the future.

And then again, in this lightning-like survey of the situation, she was conscious that she was becomingly dressed—and right glad, indeed, that she had chanced to put on the gray velvet cap with the brass beads and the curling feather; and she knew that the stranger gentleman would be courteous and civil, with admiring eyes. Moreover, she had a vague impression that he was somewhat too much given to speak of Ben Jonson; and she hoped for some opportunity to let him understand that her father was one of good estate, and much thought of by every one around, whose daughter knew what was due to his position, and could conduct herself not at all as a country wench. And so it was that the next minute found her in the twilight

of the room; and there, truly enough, he was, standing at the small window.

'Give ye good welcome, sir,' said she.

'What! fair Mistress Judith?' he said, as he quickly turned round. And he would have come forward and kissed her hand, perchance, but that a moment's hesitation prevented him.

'It may be that I have offended you,' said he, diffidently.

'In what, good sir?'

She was quite at her ease; the little touch of modest colour in her face could scarcely be attributed to rustic shyness; it was but natural, and it added to the gentleness of her look.

'Nay, then, sweet lady, 'twas but a lack of courage, that I would ask you to pardon,' said he—though he did not seem conscious of heavy guilt, to judge by the way in which his black and eloquent eyes regarded Judith's face and the prettinesses of her costume. 'There was a promise that I should communicate with you if I returned to this part of the country, but I found myself not bold enough to take advantage of your kindness. How-

ever, fortune has been my friend, since again I meet you; 'tis the luckiest chance; I but asked your good grandmother here for a cup of water as I passed, and she would have me take a cup of milk instead; and then she bade me to come in out of the heat for a space —which I was nothing loth to do, as you may guess; and here have I been taking up the good lady's time with I know not what of idle gossip——'

'But sit ye down, grandchild,' the good dame said; 'and you, sir, pray sit you down. Here, wench'—she called to the little maid that was her sole domestic. 'Go fill this jug from the best barrel.'

And then she herself proceeded to get down from the high wooden rail some of the pewter trenchers that shone there like a row of white moons in the dusk; and these she placed on the table with one or two knives; and then she began to get forth cakes, a cheese, a ham, some spiced bread, the half of a cold gooseberry-tart, and what not.

''Tis not every day we come by a visitor in these quiet parts,' said she; 'ay, good sir, and one that is not afraid to speak out his

mind. Nay, nay, grandchild, I tell thee sit thee down; thou art too fine a madam this morning to meddle wi' kitchen matters. Tell the gentleman I be rather deaf; but I thank him for his good company. Sit ye down, sweeting; sooth, you look bravely this morning.'

'Have I pleased you at last, grandmother? 'tis a miracle, surely!' she said, with a smile; and then she turned gravely to entertain the old dame's visitor. 'I hope your fortunes have mended sir,' said she.

'In a measure—somewhat—but still I am forced to take heed——'

'Perchance you have still the letter to my father?' she asked.

'Nay, madam, I considered it a prudent thing to destroy it—little as that was in my heart.'

'I had thought on your next coming to the neighbourhood that you would have taken the chance to make my father's friendship,' said she; and not without some secret disappointment; for she was anxious that this acquaintance of Ben Jonson's should see the New Place, with all its tapestries and

carved wood and silver-gilt bowls; with its large fair garden, too, and substantial barns and stables. Perhaps she would have had him carry the tale to London? There were some things (she considered) quite as fine as the trumpery masques and mummeries of the Court that the London people seemed to talk about. She would have liked him to see her father at the head of his own table, with her mother's napery shining, and plenty of good friends round the board, and her father drinking to the health of Bess Hall out of the silver-topped tankard that Thomas Combe, and Russell, and Sadler, and Julius Shawe, and the rest of them, had given him on his last birthday. Or perchance she would have had him see her father riding through the town of Stratford with some of these good neighbours (and who the handsomest of all the company? she would make bold to ask), with this one and that praising the Evesham roan, and the waggoners as they passed touching their caps to 'worthy Mahster Shacksper.' Ben Jonson! Well, she had seen Ben Jonson. There was not a maid in the town would have looked his way.

Whereas, if there were any secret enchantments going forward on Hallowmas-eve (and she knew of such, if the ministers did not), and if the young damsels were called on to form a shape in their brain as they prayed for the handsome lover that was to be sent them in the future, she was well aware what type of man they would choose from amongst those familiar to them; and also, it had more than once reached her ears that the young fellows would jokingly say among themselves that right well it was that Master Shakespeare was married and in safe keeping, else they would never have a chance. In the meanwhile, and with much courtesy, this young gentleman was endeavouring to explain to her why it was he dared not go near Stratford town.

'Truly, sweet Mistress Judith,' said he, in his suave voice, and with modestly downcast eyes, 'it is a disappointment to me in more regards than one; perchance I dare not say how much. But in these times one has to see that one's own misfortunes may not prove harmful to one's friends; and then again, ever since the French King's murder,

they are becoming harder and harder against any one, however innocent he may be, that is under suspicion. And whom do they not suspect? The Parliament have entreated the King to be more careful of his safety; and the recusants—as they call those that have some regard for the faith they were brought up in—must not appear within ten miles of the Court. Nay, they are ordered to betake themselves to their own dwellings; and by the last proclamation all Roman priests, Jesuits, and seminaries, are banished the kingdom;—I wonder not your good grandmother should have a word of pity for them that are harried this way and that for conscience sake.'

'I say naught, I say naught; 'twere well to keep a still tongue,' the old dame said, being still busy with the table. 'But I have heard there wur more peace and quiet in former days when there wur but one faith in the land; ay, and good tending of the poor folk by the monks and the rich houses.'

However, the chance reference to the French King had suddenly recalled to Judith that Prudence was waiting her in the garden,

and her conscience smote her for her neglect; while she was determined that so favourable an opportunity should not be lost of banishing once and for ever her dear gossip's cruel suspicions. So she rose.

'I crave your pardon, good sir,' said she, 'if I leave you for a moment to seek my gossip Prudence Shawe that was to wait for me in the garden. I would have you acquainted with each other; but pray you, sir, forbear to say anything against the Puritan section of the church, for she is well inclined that way, and she has a heart that is easily wounded.'

'And thank you for the caution, fair Mistress Judith,' said he, and he rose, and bowed low; and stood hat in hand until she had left the apartment.

At first, so blinding was the glare of light and colour, she could hardly see; but presently, when her eyes were less dazzled, she looked everywhere, and found the garden quite empty. She called; there was no answer. She went down to the little gate; there was no one in the road. And so, taking it for granted that Prudence had

sought safety in flight, and was now back in Stratford town, or on the way thither, she returned into the cottage with a light heart, and well content to hear what news was abroad.

'Pray you, sir,' said old Mistress Hathaway, 'sit in to the table; and you, grandchild, come your ways. If the fare be poor, the welcome is hearty. What, then, Judith? Dined already, say'st thou? Body o' me, a fresh-coloured young wench like you should be ready for your dinner at any time. Well, well, sit thee in, and grace the table; and you shall sip a cup of claret for the sake of good company.'

Master Leofric Hope, on the other hand, was not at all backward in applying himself to this extemporised meal; on the contrary, he did it such justice as fairly warmed the old dame's heart. And he drank to her, moreover, bending low over his cup of ale; but he did not do the like by Judith—for some reason or another. And all the while he was telling them of the affairs of the town; as to how there was much talking of the new river that was to bring water

from some ten or twelve miles off, and how one Middleton was far advanced with the cutting of it, although many were against it, and would have the project overthrown altogether. Of these and similar matters he spoke right pleasantly, and the old dame was greatly interested; but Judith grew to think it strange that so much should be said about public affairs, and what the people were talking about, and yet no mention made of her father. And so it came about, when he went on to tell them of the new ship of war that so many were going to see at Woolwich, and that the King made so much of, she said—

'Oh, my father knows all about that ship. 'Twas but the other day I heard him and Master Combe speak of it; and of the King too; and my father said, "Poor man, 'tis a far smaller ship than that he will make his last voyage in."'

'Said he that of the King?'

She looked up in quick alarm.

'But as he would have said it of me or of you or of any one,' she exclaimed. 'Nay, my father is well inclined towards the King,

though he be not as much at the Court as some, nor caring to make pageants for the Court ladies and their attendants and followers.'

If there were any sarcasm in this speech he did not perceive it, for it merely led him on to speak of the new masque that Ben Jonson was preparing for the Prince Henry; and incidentally he mentioned that the subject was to be Oberon the Fairy Prince.

'Oberon?' said Judith, opening her eyes. 'Why, my father hath writ about that!'

'Oh yes, as we all know,' said he courteously; 'but there will be a difference——'

'A difference?' said she. 'By my life, yes! There will be a difference. I wonder that Master Jonson was not better advised.'

'Nay, in this matter, good Mistress Judith,' said he, 'there will be no comparison. I know 'tis the fashion to compare them——'

'To compare my father and Master Jonson?' she said, as if she had not heard aright. 'Why, what comparison? In what way? Pray you remember, sir, I have seen

Master Ben Jonson. I have seen him, and spoken with him. And as for my father, I'll be bound there is not his fellow for a handsome presence and gracious manners in all Warwickshire — no, nor in London town neither, I'll be sworn!'

'I meant not that, sweet lady,' said he, with a smile; and he added grimly: 'I grant you our Ben looks as if he had been in the wars; he hath had a tussle with Bacchus on many a merry night, and bears the scars of these noble combats. No, 'tis the fashion to compare them as wits——'

'I'd as lief compare them as men, good sir,' said she, with a touch of pride, 'and I know right well which should have my choice.'

'When it is my good fortune, dear lady,' said the young man, 'to have Master William Shakespeare's daughter sitting before me, I need no other testimony to his grace and bearing, even had I never set eyes on him.' And with that he bowed low; and there was a slight flush on her face that was none of displeasure, while the old dame said—

'Ay, ay, there be many a wench in Warwickshire worse-favoured than she; pray

heaven it turn not her head; the wench is a good wench, but ill to manage; and 'twere no marvel if the young men got tired of waiting.'

To escape from any further discussion of this subject Judith proposed that they should go out and look at her grandmother's roses and pansies, which was in truth the object of her visit; and she added that if Master Hope (this was the first time she had named him by his name) were still desirous of avoiding observation, they could go to the little bower at the upper hedgerow, which was sufficiently screened from the view of any passer-by. The old dame was right willing, for she was exceedingly proud of this garden that had no other tending than her own; and so she got her knitting-needles and ball of wool, and preceded them out into the warm air and the sunlight.

'Dear, dear me,' said she, stopping to regard two small shrubs that stood withered and brown by the side of the path. 'There be something strange in that rosemary now, in good sooth there be; try as I may, I cannot bring them along; the spring frost makes

sure to kill them.' And then she went on again.

'Strange, indeed,' said the young man to his companion, these two being somewhat behind, 'that a plant that is so fickle and difficult to hold should be the emblem of constancy.'

'I know not what they do elsewhere,' said Judith, carelessly pulling a withered leaf or two to see if they were quite inodorous, 'but hereabouts they often use a bit of rosemary for a charm and the summoning of spirits.'

He started somewhat, and glanced at her quickly and curiously. But there was clearly no subtle intention in the speech. She idly threw away the leaves.

'Have you faith in such charms, Mistress Judith?' said he, still regarding her.

'In truth I know not,' she answered, as if the question were of but little moment. 'There be some who believe in them, and others that laugh. But strange stories are told; marry, there be some of them that are not pleasant to hear of a winter's night, when one has to change the warm chimney-corner for the cold room above. There is my grand-

mother, she hath a rare store of them; but they fit not well with the summer-time and with such a show as this.'

'A goodly show indeed,' said he; and by this time they were come to a small arbour of rude lattice-work mostly smothered in foliage; and there was a seat within it, and also a tiny table; while in front they were screened from the gaze of any one going along the road by a straggling and propped-up wall of peas that were now showing their large white blossoms plentifully among the green.

''Tis a quiet spot,' said he, when they were seated, and the old dame had taken to her knitting; ''tis enough to make one pray never to hear more of the din and turmoil of London.'

'I should have thought, sir,' said Judith, 'you would have feared to go near London, if there be those that would fain get to know of your whereabout.'

'Truly,' said he, 'I have no choice. I must run the risk. From time to time I must seek to see whether the cloud that is hanging over me gives signs of breaking. And surely such must now be the case, when fortune hath

been so kind to me as to place me where I am at this moment—in such company—with such a quiet around. 'Tis like the work of a magician; though from time to time I remind me that I should rise and leave, craving your pardon for intruding on you withal.'

'Trouble not yourself, young sir,' the old dame said, in her matter-of-fact way, as she looked up from her knitting, 'if the place content you, 'tis right well; we be in no such hurry in these country parts; we let the day go by as it lists, and thank God for a sound night's rest at the end of it.'

'And you have a more peaceful and happy life than the London citizens, I'll be bound,' said he, 'with all their feasts and gaieties and the noise of drums and the like.'

'We hear but the murmur of such things from a far distance,' Judith said. 'Was there not a great to-do on the river when the citizens gave their welcome to the Prince?'

'Why, there, now,' said he, brightening up at this chance of repaying in some measure the courtesy of his entertainers; 'there was as wonderful a thing as London ever saw. A noble spectacle, truly; for

the Companies would not be outdone; and such bravery of apparel, and such a banqueting in the afternoon! And perchance you heard of it but through some news-letter? Shall I tell you what I saw on my own part?'

'If it be not too troublesome to you, good sir.'

He was glad enough; for he had noticed, when he was describing such things, that Judith's eyes grew absent, and he could gaze at them without fear of causing her to start and blush. Moreover, it was a pretty face to tell a story to; and the day was so still and shining; and all around them there was a scent of roses in the air.

'Why, it was about daybreak, as I should think,' he said, 'that the citizens began to come forth; and a bright fair morning it was; and all of them in their best array. And you may be sure that when the Companies learned that the whole of the citizens were minded to show their love for the Prince Henry on his coming back from Richmond, they were not like to be behindhand; and such preparations had been made

as you would scarce believe. Well, then, so active were they in their several ways that by eight of the clock the Companies were all assembled in their barges of state to wait the Lord Mayor and Aldermen; and such a sound of drums and trumpets and fifes was there; and the water covered with the fleet, and the banks all crowded with them that had come down to see. Then the Lord Mayor and the Aldermen being arrived, the great procession set forth in state; and such a booming of cannon there was, and cheering from the crowd. 'Twas a sight, on my life; for they bore the pageant with them—that was a huge whale and a dolphin; and on the whale sate a fair and lovely nymph, Corinea she was called, the Queen of Cornwall; and she had a coronet of strange sea-shells, and strings of pearls around her neck and on her wrists; and her dress was of crimson silk, so that all could make her out from a distance; and she had a silver shield slung on to her left arm and in her right hand a silver spear —oh, a wonderful sight she was; I marvel not the crowd cheered and cheered again. Then on the other animal—that is the

dolphin—sate one that represented Amphion —he was the father of music, as you must know; and a long beard he wore, and he also had a wreath of sea-shells on his head, and in his hand a harp of gold that shone in the sun. Well, away they set towards Chelsea; and there they waited for the Prince's approach——'

'And the young Prince himself,' Judith said, quickly and eagerly, 'he bears himself well, does he not? He bears himself like a prince? He would match such a pageant right royally, is't not so?'

'Why, he is the very model and mirror of princehood!—the pink of chivalry!—nor is there one of them at the Court that can match him at the knightly exercises,' said this enthusiastic chronicler, who had his reward in seeing how interested she was. 'Well, when the young Prince was come to Chelsea, there he paused, and the Queen Corinea addressed him in a speech of welcome—truly, I could not hear a word of it, there being such a noise among the multitude, but I was told thereafter that it presented him with their love and loyal duty; and then

they all set forth towards Whitehall again. By this time 'twas later in the day; and no man would have believed so many dwelt in the neighbourhood of our great river; and that again was as naught to the crowd assembled when they were come again to the town. And here—as it must have been arranged beforehand, doubtless—the fleet of barges separated, and formed two long lines, so as to make a lane for the Prince to pass through, with great cheering and shouting, so that when they were come to the Court steps he was at the head of them all. And now it was that the dolphin approached, and Amphion, that was riding on his back, bid the Prince a loyal farewell in the name of all the citizens; and at the end of the speech—which, in truth, the people guessed at rather than heard—there was such a tumult of huzzas, and a firing of cannon, and the drums and the trumpets sounding, and on every hand you could hear nothing but "Long live our Prince of Wales, the Royal Henry!"'

'And he bore himself bravely, I'll dare be sworn!' she exclaimed. 'I have heard my father speak of him—he is one that will

uphold the honour of England when he comes to the throne!'

'And there was such a feasting and rejoicing that evening,' he continued, 'within-doors and without; and many an honest man, I fear me, transgressed, and laid the train for a sore distracted head next day. Then 'twas some two or three evenings after that, if I remember aright, that we had the great water-fight and the fireworks—but perchance you heard of these, sweet Mistress Judith?'

'In truth, good sir,' she answered, 'I heard of these as of the welcome you speak of, but in so scant a way as to be of no avail. 'Tis not a kind of talking that is encouraged at our house; unless, indeed, when Julius Shawe and Master Combe and some of them come in of an evening to chat with my father; and then sometimes I contrive to linger, with the bringing in of a flagon of Rhenish or the like—until I am chid and sent forth. I pray you, good sir, if I do not outwear your patience, to tell us of the water-fight, too.'

''Tis I that am more like to outwear your

patience, fair Judith,' said he. 'I would I had a hundred fights to tell you of. But this one—well, 'twas a rare and goodly pageant; and a vast crowd was come down to the water's edge to see what was going forward, for most of the business of the day was over, and both master and prentice were free. And very soon we saw how the story was going; for there was a Turkish pirate, with fierce men with blackened faces; and they would plunder two English merchantmen and make slaves of the crews. This was but the beginning of the fight; and there was great firing of guns and manœuvring of the vessels; and the merchantmen were like to fare badly, not being trained to arms like the pirate. In sooth they were sore bestead; but presently up came two ships of war to the rescue, and then the coil began in good earnest, I warrant you; for there was boarding and charging and clambering over the bulwarks—ay, and many an honest man on both sides knocked into the sea—until in the end they had killed or secured all the pirates, and then there was naught to do but to blow up the pirate ship into the air, with a noise like thunder, and

scarce a rag or spar of him remaining. 'Twas a right good ending, I take it, in the minds of the worthy citizens; doubtless they hoped that every Turkish rogue would be served the like. And then it was that the blowing up of the pirate ship was a kind of signal for the beginning of the fireworks; and it had grown to dusk now; so that the blazes of red light and blue light and the whizzing of the squibs and what not seemed to fill all the air. 'Twas a rare climax to the destruction of the Turkish thieves; and the people cheered and cheered again when 'twas well done; and then at the end came a great discharge of guns and squibs and showers of stars that one would have thought the whole world was set on fire. Sure I am that the waters of the Thames never saw such a sight before. And the people went home right well content; and I doubt not drank to the confusion of all pirates, as well as to the health of the young Prince, that is to preserve the realm to us in years to come.'

They talked for some time thereafter about that and other matters, and about his own condition and occupations at the farm; and

then he rose, and there was a smile on his face.

'You know, fair Mistress Judith,' said he, 'that a wise man is careful not to outstay his welcome, lest it be not offered to him again; and your good grandmother has afforded me so pleasant an hour's gossip and good company that I would fain look forward to some other chance of the same in the future.'

'Must you go, good sir?' said Judith, also rising. 'I trust we have not overtaxed your patience. We country folk are hungry listeners.'

'To have been awarded so much of your time, sweet Mistress Judith,' said he, bowing very low, 'is an honour I am not likely to forget.'

And then he addressed the old dame, who had missed something of this.

'Give ye good thanks for your kindness, good Mistress Hathaway,' said he.

'Good fortune attend ye, sir,' said the old dame contentedly, and without ceasing from her knitting.

Judith was standing there, with her eyes cast down.

'Sweet lady, by your leave,' said he, and he took her hand and raised it and just touched her fingers with his lips. Then he bowed low again and withdrew.

'Fare you well, good sir,' Judith had said at the same moment, but without any word as to a future meeting. Then she returned into the little arbour and sate down.

'Is't not like a meteor, grandmother, shooting across the sky?' said she, merrily. 'Beshrew me, but the day has grown dark since he left! Didst ever hear of such a gallymawfrey of dolphins and whales, and prince's barges, and the roaring of cannon, and fireworks? Sure 'tis well we live in the country quiet—our ears would be riven in twain else. And you, grandmother, that was ever preaching about prudent behaviour, to be harbouring one that may be an outlaw—a recusant—perchance he hath drawn his sword in the King's presence——'

'What know you of the young gentleman, Judith?' the old dame said, sharply.

'Marry, not a jot beyond what he hath doubtless told to yourself, good grandmother. But see you any harm in him? Have you

suspicion of him? Would you have me think —as Prudence would fain believe—that there be witchcraft about him?'

'Truly I see no harm in the young gentleman,' the old grandmother was constrained to say. 'And he be fair spoken, and modest withal. But look you to this, wench: should you chance to meet him again while he bideth here in this neighbourhood—I trow 'twere better you did not—but should that chance, see you keep a still tongue in your head about church and King and Parliament. Let others meddle who choose: 'tis none of your affairs; do you hear me, child? These be parlous times, as the talk is; they do well that keep the byways, and let my lord's coaches go whither they list.'

'Grandmother,' said Judith, gravely, 'I know there be many things in which I cannot please you, but this sin that you would lay to my charge—nay, dear grandam, when have you caught me talking about church and King and Parliament? Truly I wish them well; but I am content if they go their own way.'

The old dame glanced at her to see what this demure tone of speech meant.

'Thou?' she said, in a sort of grumble. 'Thy brain be filled with other gear, I reckon. 'Tis a bit of ribbon that hath hold of thee; or the report as to which of the lads shot best at the match; or perchance 'tis the purchase of some penny ballads, that you may put the pictures on your chamber-wall, as if you were a farm-wench just come in from the milking-pail.'

'Heaven have pity on me, good grandmother,' said she, with much penitence, and she looked down at her costume, 'but I can find no way of pleasing you. You scold me for being but a farm-wench; and truly this petticoat, though it be pretty enough, methinks might have been made of a costlier stuff; and my cap—good grandmother, look at my cap——'

She took it off, and smoothed the gray velvet of it, and arranged the beads and the feather.

'Is the cap also too much of the fashion of a farm-wench? or have I gone amiss the other way, and become too like a city dame? Would that I knew how to please you, grandam!'

'Go thy ways, child, get thee home!' the old woman said, but only half-angrily. 'Thy foolish head hath been turned by hearing of those Court gambols. Get you to your needle; be your mother's napery all so well mended that you can spend the whole day in idleness?'

'Nay, but you are in the right there, good grandmother,' said Judith, drawing closer to her, and taking her thin and wrinkled hand in her own warm, white soft ones. 'But not to the needle—not to the needle, good grandam; I have other eggs on the spit. Did not I tell you of the Portugal receipts that Prudence got for me—in good sooth I did; well, the dishes were made; and next day at dinner my father was right well pleased. 'Tis little heed he pays to such matters, and we scarce thought of asking him how he liked the fare, when all at once he said: "Good mother, you must give my thanks to Jane cook; 'twill cheer her in her work; nay, I owe them." Then says my mother: "But these two dishes were not prepared by the cook, good husband; 'twas one of the maids." "One of the maids?" he says. "Well, which

one of the maids?—truly, 'tis something rare to be found in a country house." And then there was a laughing amongst all of them; and he fixes his eyes on me. "What?" he says, "that saucy wench? Is she striving to win her a husband at last?" And so you see, good grandmother, I must waste no more time here; for Prudence hath one or two more of these receipts, and I must try them to see whether my father approves or not.'

And so she kissed the old dame, and bade her farewell, refusing at the same time to have the escort of the small maid across the meadows to the town.

All the temporary annoyance of the morning was now over and forgotten; she was wholly pleased to have had this interview, and to have heard minutely of all the great doings in London. She walked quickly; a careless gladness shone in her face; and she was lightly singing to herself—as she went along the well-beaten path through the fields—

'*Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more,*
Men were deceivers ever.'

But it was not in the nature of any complaint

against the inconstancy of man that this rhyme had come into her head. Quite other thoughts came as well. At one moment she was saying to herself:

'Why, now, have I no spaniel-gentle with me to keep me company?'

And then the next minute she was saying, with a sort of laugh:

'God help me, I fear I am none of the spaniel-gentle kind!'

But there was no deep smiting of conscience even when she confessed so much. Her face was radiant and content; she looked at the cattle—or the trees, or the children, as it chanced—as if she knew them all, and knew that they were friendly towards her; and then again the idle air would come into her brain—

> '*Then sigh not so, but let them go,*
> *And be you blithe and bonny;*
> *Converting all your sounds of woe*
> *Into hey, nonny, nonny!*'

CHAPTER II.

A TIREWOMAN.

It was not until after supper that evening that Judith was free to seek out her companion who had fled from her in the morning; and when she did steal forth—carrying a small basket in her hand—she approached the house with much more caution than was habitual with her. She glanced in at the lower windows, but could see nothing. Then, instead of trying whether the latch was left loose, she formally knocked at the door.

It was opened by a little rosy-cheeked girl of eleven or twelve, who instantly bobbed a respectful curtsey.

'Is Mistress Prudence within, little Margery?' she said.

'Yes, if it please you,' said the little wench, and she stood aside to let Judith pass.

But Judith did not enter; she seemed listening.

'Where is she?'

'In her own chamber, if it please you.'

'Alone, then?'

'Yes, if it please you, Mistress Judith.'

Judith patted the little maid in requital of her courtesy, and then stole noiselessly upstairs. The door was open. Prudence was standing before a small table ironing a pair of snow-white cuffs; the while she was repeating to herself verses of a psalm. Her voice, low as it was, could be heard distinctly:

'*Open thou my lips, O Lord, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.*

For thou desirest no sacrifice, though I would give it; thou delightest not in burnt-offering.

The sacrifices of God are a contrite spirit; a contrite and a broken heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

Be favourable unto Zion for thy good pleasure; build the walls of Jerusalem.

Then shalt thou accept the sacrifices of righteousness, even the burnt-offering and oblation; then shall they offer calves upon thine altar.'

She happened to turn her head; and then she uttered a slight cry of surprise, and came quickly to Judith, and caught her by the hand.

'What said he?' she exclaimed, almost breathlessly. 'You saw him? 'Twas the same, was it not? How came he there? Judith, tell me!'

'You timid mouse that ran away!' the other said, with a complacent smile. 'Why, what should he say? But prithee go on with the cuffs, else the iron will be cold. And are you alone in the house, Prudence? There is no one below?'

'None but the maids, I trow; or Julius, perchance, if he be come in from the malt-house.'

'Quick, then, with the cuffs,' Judith said, 'and get them finished. Nay, I will tell thee all about the young gentleman thereafter. Get thee finished with the cuffs, and put them on——'

'But I meant them not for this evening, Judith,' said she, with her eyes turned away.

''Tis this evening, and now, you must wear them,' her friend said peremptorily. 'And more than these. See I have brought you some things, dear gossip, that you must wear for my sake—nay, nay, I will take no denial—you must and shall—and with haste, too, must you put them on, lest any one should

come and find the mistress of the house out of call. Is not this pretty, good Prudence?'

She had opened the basket and taken therefrom a plaited ruff that the briefest feminine glance showed to be of the finest cobweb-lawn, tinged a faint saffron hue, and tied with silken strings. Prudence, who now divined the object of her visit, was overwhelmed with confusion. The fair and pensive face became rose-red with embarrassment; and she did not even know how to protest.

'And this,' said Judith, in the most matter-of-fact way, taking something else out of the basket, 'will also become you well—nay, not so, good mouse, you shall be as prim and Puritanical as you please to-morrow; to-night you shall be a little braver; and is it not handsome, too?—'twas a gift to my mother—and she knows that I have it—though I have never worn it.'

This second article that she held out and stroked with her fingers was a girdle of buff-coloured leather, embroidered with flowers in silk of different colours, and having a margin of filigree silverwork both above and below, and a broad silver clasp.

'Come, then, let's try——'

'Nay, Judith,' the other said, retreating a step, 'I cannot—indeed, I cannot——'

'Indeed, you must, silly child!' Judith said, and she caught hold of her angrily. 'I say you shall. What know you of such things? Must I teach you manners?'

And when Judith was in this authoritative mood Prudence had but little power to withstand her. Her face was still burning with embarrassment; but she succumbed in silence; while Judith whipped off the plain linen collar that her friend wore, and set on in its stead this small but handsome ruff. She arranged it carefully, and smoothed Prudence's soft fair hair, and gave a finishing touch to the three-cornered cap: then she stepped back a pace or two to contemplate her handiwork.

'There!' she exclaimed (pretending to see nothing of Prudence's blushes). 'A princess! On my life, a princess! And now for the girdle—but you must cast aside that housewife's pouch, sweetheart, and I will lend thee this little pomander of mine; in truth 'twill suit it well——'

'No, no, dear Judith!' the other said, almost

piteously, 'indeed I cannot prank me out in these borrowed plumes. If you will have it so, I will wear the ruff; but not the girdle—not the girdle, dear cousin—that all would see was none of mine——'

'What's that?' Judith exclaimed suddenly, for there was a noise below.

''Tis Julius come in from the barn,' Prudence said.

'Mercy on us,' the other cried, with a laugh, 'I thought 'twas the spaniel-gentle come already. So you will not wear the girdle? Well, the ruff becomes you right fairly: and—and those roses in your cheeks, good Prue—why, what is the matter? Is there aught wonderful in one of Julius's friends coming to see him in the evening? And as the mistress of the house you must receive him well and courteously; and be not so demure of speech, and distant in manner, dearest heart, for youth must have a little merriment, and we cannot always be at our prayers.'

'I know not what you mean, Judith, unless it be something that is far away from any thought or wish of mine.'

There was a touch of sincerity in this

speech that instantly recalled Judith from her half-jibing ways. The truth was, that while she herself was free enough in confiding to this chosen gossip of hers all about such lovers or would-be lovers as happened to present themselves, Prudence had never volunteered any similar confidence in return; and the very fact that there might be reasons for this reticence was enough to keep Judith from seeking to remove the veil. Judith herself was accustomed to make merry over the whole matter of sweethearts and rhymed messages and little tender gifts; but Prudence was sensitive, and Judith was careful not to wound her by indiscreet questioning. And at this moment, when Prudence was standing there confused and abashed, some compunction seized the heart of her friend. She took her hand.

'In good sooth, I meant not to tease you, sweetheart,' said she, in a kindly way; 'and if I advise you in aught 'tis but that you should make your brother's house a pleasant resort for them that would be friendly with him and visit him. What harm can there be in receiving such with a cheerful welcome?—and

having a pretty house-mistress and all things neat and conformable? Dear mouse, you so often lecture me that I must have my turn; and I do not find fault or cause of quarrel; 'tis but a wish that you would be less severe in your ways, and let your kind heart speak more freely. Men, that have the burden of the world's fight to bear, love to meet womenfolk that have a merry and cheerful countenance—'twere a marvel else; and of an evening, when there is idleness, and some solace after the labours of the day, why should one be glum, and thinking ever of that next world that is coming soon enough of its own accord? Look you, now, how well the ruff becomes you; and what sin is in it? The girdle too—think you my mother would have worn it had there been aught of evil in a simple piece of leather and embroidery?'

'Tis many a day since she put it aside, as I well remember,' Prudence said—but with a smile, for she was easily won over.

'Truly,' said Judith, with a touch of scorn, 'the good preachers are pleased to meddle with small matters when they would tell a woman what she should wear, and order a

maiden to give up a finger-ring or a bit of lace, on peril of losing her soul. These be marvellous small deer to be so hunted and stormed about with bell, book, and candle. But now, good Prudence, for this one evening I would have you please your visitor and entertain him; and the spaniel-gentle—that, indeed, you must take from him——'

'I cannot, dear Judith; 'twas meant for you!' Prudence exclaimed.

'You cannot go back from your promise, good cousin,' Judith said, coolly, and with some slight inattention to facts. ''Twould be unmannerly of you to refuse the gift, or to refuse ample thanks for it either. And see you have plenty on the board, for men like good fare along with good company; and let there be no stint of wine or ale as they may choose, for your brother's house, Prudence, must not be niggard, were it only for appearance sake.'

'But you will stay, dear Judith, will you not?' the other said, anxiously. 'In truth you can entertain them all, wherever you go; and always there is such heart in the company——'

'Nay, I cannot, sweet mouse,' Judith said,

lightly. 'There is much for me to do now in the evenings, since Susan has gone back to her own home. And now I must go, lest your visitor arrive and find you unprepared: marry, you must wear the cuffs as they are, since I have hindered you in the ironing.'

'But you cannot go, Judith, till you have told me what happened to-day at the cottage,' the other pleaded.

'What happened? Why, nothing!' Judith said, brightly. 'Only that my grandmother is of a mind with myself, that a fairer-spoken young gentleman seldom comes into these parts, and that, when he does, he should be made welcome. Bless thy heart, hadst thou but come in and seen how attentive the good dame was to him; and she would press him to have some claret-wine, but he said no—perchance he guessed that good grandam had but small store of that. Nay, but you should have come in, Prudence—then would you assuredly have been conscience-smitten about all your dark surmisings. A murderer forsooth!—a ghost!—a phantom!—why, so civil was his manner that he but asked for a cup of water in passing, and my grand-

mother must needs have him come in out of the sun, and rest him, and have some milk. Was that like a ghost? I warrant you there was naught of the ghost about him when she put a solid repast before him on the table; ghosts make no such stout attacks on gooseberry tart and cheese, else they be sore belied.'

'But who and what is this man, Judith?'

'Why, who can tell what any man is?' said the other. 'They all of them are puzzles, and unlike other human creatures. But this one—well, he hath a rare store of knowledge as to what is going forward at the Court—and among the players, too; and as we sate in the little bower there you would have sworn you could see before you the river Thames with a wonderful pageant on it—dolphins and whales, and crowned sea-queens and the like; and in the midst of them all the young Prince Henry: "Long live the young Prince Henry!" they cried; and there was such a noise of drums and cannons and trumpets that you could scarce hear my grandmother's bees among the flowers. I warrant you the good dame was well repaid

for her entertainment, and right well pleased with the young gentleman: I should not marvel to find him returning thither, seeing that he can remain there in secrecy, and have such gossip as pleases him.'

'But, Judith, you know not what you do!' her friend protested anxiously. 'Do you forget—nay, you cannot forget—that this was the very man the wizard prophesied that you should meet; and more than that, that he would be your husband!'

'My husband?' said Judith, with a flush of colour, and she laughed uneasily. 'Nay, not so, good Prudence. He is not one that is likely to choose a country wench. Nay, nay, the juggler knave failed me—that is the truth of it; the charm was a thing of naught; and this young gentleman, if I met him by accident, the same might have happened to you, as I showed you before. Marry, I should not much crave to see him again, if anything like that were in the wind; this is Stratford town, 'tis not the forest of Arden; and in this neighbourhood a maiden may not go forth to seek her lover and coax him into the wooing of her. My father may put that into a play,

but methinks if he heard of his own daughter doing the like the key would quickly be turned on her. Nay, nay, good Prue, you shall not fright me out of doing a civil kindness to a stranger, and one that is in misfortune, by flaunting his lovership before my eyes. There be no such thing: do not I know the tokens? By my life, this gentleman is too courteous to have a lover's mind within him!'

'And you will go and see him again, Judith?' her friend asked quickly.

'Nay, I said not that,' Judith answered, with some complacence. ''Tis not the forest of Arden—would to heaven it were, for then life would move to a pleasanter music! I said not that I would go forth and seek him—that were not maidenly; and belike there would come a coil of talking among the gossips, or soon or late; but at this time of the year, do you see, dear cousin, the country is fair to look upon; and the air is sweeter in the meadows than it is here in the town; and if a lone damsel, forsaken by all else, should be straying silent and forlorn along the pathway or by the river-side, and should encounter one

that hath but lately made her acquaintance, why should not that acquaintance be permitted in all modesty and courtesy to ripen into friendship? The harm, good Prue; the harm of it? Tush, your head is filled with childish fears of the wizard; that is the truth; and had you but come into the house to-day, and had but five minutes' speech of the young gentleman, you would have been as ready as any one to help in the beguilement of the tedium of his hiding, if that be possible to two or three silly women. And bethink you, was't not a happy chance that I wore my new velvet cap this morning?'

But she had been speaking too carelessly and jestingly. This was a slip; and instantly she added—with some touch of confusion—

'I mean that I would fain have my father's friends in London know that his family are not so far out of the world or out of the fashion.'

'Is he one of your father's friends, Judith?' Prudence said, gravely.

'He is a friend of my father's friends, at least,' said she, 'and some day, I doubt not, he will himself be one of these. Truly that

will be a rare sight, some evening at New Place, when we confront you with him, and tell him how he was charged with being a ghost, or a pirate, or an assassin, or something of the like.'

'Your fancy runs free, Judith,' her friend said. 'Is't a probable thing, think you, that one that dares not come forth into the day, that is hiding from justice, or perchance scheming in Catholic plots, should become the friend of your house?'

'You saw him not at my grandmother's board, good Prue,' said Judith, coolly. 'The young gentleman hath the trick of making himself at home wherever he cometh, I warrant you. And when this cloud blows away, and he is free to come to Stratford, there be none will welcome him more heartily than I; for methinks he holdeth Master Benjamin Jonson in too high consideration; and I would have him see what is thought of my father in the town, and what his estate is, and that his family, though they live not in London, are not wholly of Moll-the-milk-maid kind. And I would have Susan come over, too; and were she to forget her preachers

and her psalms for but an evening, and were there any merriment going forward, the young gentleman would have to keep his wits clear, I'll be bound. There is the house, too, I would have him see; and the silver-topped tankard with the writing on it from my father's good friends; nay, I warrant me Julius would not think of denying me the loan of the King's letter to my father—were it but for an hour or two——'

But here they were startled into silence by a knocking below; then there was the sound of a man's voice in the narrow passage.

''Tis he, sweetheart,' Judith said, quickly, and she kissed her friend, and gave a final touch to the ruff and the cap. 'Get you down and welcome him; I will go out when that you have shut the door of the room. And be merry, good heart, be merry—be brave and merry, as you love me!'

She almost thrust her out of the apartment, and listened to hear her descend the stairs; then she waited for the shutting of the chamber-door, and finally she stole noiselessly down into the passage and let herself out, without waiting for the little maid Margery.

CHAPTER III.

A FIRST PERFORMANCE.

'NAY, zur,' said the sour-visaged Matthew, as he leaned his chin and both hands on the end of a rake, and spoke in his slow-drawling grumbling fashion; 'nay, zur, this country be no longer the country it wur; no, nor never will be again.'

'Why, what ails the land?' said Judith's father, turning from the small table in the summer-house, and lying back in his chair, and crossing one knee over the other, as if he would give a space to idleness.

'Not the land, zur,' rejoined goodman Matthew, oracularly. 'Not the land; it be the men that live in it; and that are all in such haste to make wealth, with plundering of the poor and of each other, that there's naught but lying and cheating and roguery—God a mercy, there never wur the loike in

any country under the sun. Why, zur, in my vather's time, a pair o' shoes would wear you through all weathers for a year; but now, with their half-tanned leather, and their horse-hide, and their cat-skin for the inner sole, 'tis a marvel if the rotten leaves come not asunder within a month. And they be all aloike; the devil would have no choice among 'em; the clothmaker he hideth his bad wool wi' liquid stuff; and the tailor, no matter whether it be doublet, cloak, or hose, he will filch you his quarter of the cloth ere you see it again; and the chandler—he be no better than the rest—he will make you his wares of stinking offal that will splutter and run over and do aught but give good light; and the vintner, marry, who knoweth not his tricks and knaveries of mixing and blending, and the selling of poison instead of honest liquor? The rogue butcher, too, he will let the blood soak in, ay, and puff wind into the meat—meat, quotha!—'tis as like as not to have been found dead in a ditch!'

'A bad case, indeed, good Matthew, if they be all preying on each other so.'

''Tis the poor man pays for all, zur,' said

Matthew, continuing his growlings (which, indeed, were for the most part but echoes of Stubbes, that had reached him through the Puritan preachers). 'Though how he liveth to pay no man can tell, what with the landlords racking the rents, and enclosing the commons and pasturages—nay, 'tis a noble pastime the making of parks and warrens, and shutting the poor man out, that used to have his cow there and a pig or two; but no, now shall he not let a goose stray within the fence. And what help hath the poor man? May he go to the lawyers, with their leases and clauses that none can understand—ay, and their fists that must be well greased ere they set to the business? 'Tis the poor man pays for all, zur, I warrant ye; nor must he grumble when the gentleman goes a-hunting and breaks down his hedges and tramples his corn. Corn? 'Tis the last thing they think of, beshrew me else! They are busiest of all in sending our good English grain—ay, and our English beef, and bacon, and tallow—beyond the seas; and to bring back what?—baubles of glass beads and amber, fans for my ladies, and new toys from Turkey! The

proud dames—I would have their painted faces scratched!'

'What, what, good Matthew?' Judith's father said, laughing. 'What know you of the city ladies and their painting?'

'Nay, nay, zur, the London tricks be spread abroad, I warrant ye; there's not a farmer's wife nowadays but must have her French hood and her daughter a taffeta cap—marry, and a grogram gown lined through with velvet! And there be other towns in the land than London, to learn the London tricks; I have heard of the dames and their daughters; set them up with their pinching and girding with whalebone, to get a small waist withal!—ay, and the swallowing of ashes and candles and whatever will spoil their stomach to give them a pale-bleak colour. Lord, what a thing 'tis to be rich and in the fashion!—let the poor man suffer as he may. Corn, i'faith!—there be plenty of corn grown in the land, God wot; but 'tis main too dear for the poor man; the rack-rents for him, and a murrain on him; the corn for the fore-stallers and the merchants and gentlemen, that send it out of the

country; and back come the silks and civets for proud Madam and her painted crew!'

'God have mercy on us, man!' Judith's father exclaimed, and he drove him aside, and got out into the sunlight. At the same moment he caught sight of Judith herself.

'Come hither, wench, come hither!' he called to her.

She was nothing loth. She had merely been taking some scraps to the Don; and seeing Matthew in possession there, she had not even stayed to look into the summer-house. But when her father came out and called to her, she went quickly towards him; and her eyes were bright enough—on this bright morning.

'What would you, father?'

For answer he plucked off her cap and threw it aside, and took hold of her by a bunch of her now loosened and short sun-brown curls.

'Father!' she protested (but with no great anger). 'There be twenty minutes' work undone!'

'Where bought you those roses?' said he, sternly. 'Answer me, wench!'

'I bought no roses, father!'

'The paint? Is't not painted? Where got you such a face, madam?'

'Father, you have undone my hair; and the parson is coming to dinner.'

'Nay, I'll be sworn 'tis as honest a face as mother nature ever made. This goodman Matthew hath belied you!'

'What said he of me?' she asked, with a flash of anger in her eyes.

Her father put his hand on her neck, and led her away.

'Nay, nay, come thy ways, lass; thou shalt pick me a handful of raspberries. And as for thine hair, let that be as God made it; 'tis even better so; and yet methinks'—here he stopped and passed his hand lightly once or twice over her head, so that any half-imprisoned curls were set free—'methinks,' said he, regarding the pretty hair with considerable favour, 'if you would as lief have some ornament for it, I saw that in London that would answer right well. 'Twas a network kind of cap; but the netting so fine you could scarce see it; and at each point a bead of gold: now, Madam Vanity, what say

you to that?—would you let your hair grow free as it is now, and let the sunlight play with it, were I to bring thee a fairy cap all besprinkled with gold?'

'I will wear it any way you wish, father, and right gladly,' said she, 'and I will have no cap at all if it please you.'

'Nay, but you shall have the gossamer cap, wench; I will not forget it when next I go to London.'

'I would you had never to go to London again,' said she, rather timidly.

He regarded her for a second with a scrutinising look, and there was an odd sort of smile on his face.

'Why,' said he, 'I was but this minute writing about a man that had to use diverse arts and devices for the attainment of a certain end—yea, and devices that all the world would not approve of, perchance; and that was ever promising to himself that when the end was gained he would put aside these spells and tricks, and be content to live as other men live, in a quiet and ordinary fashion. Wouldst have me live ever in Stratford, good lass?'

'The life of the house goes out when you go away from us,' said she simply.

'Well, Stratford is no wilderness,' said he cheerfully; 'and I have no bitter feud with mankind that I would live apart from them. Didst ever think, wench,' he added, more absently, 'how sad a man must have been ere he could speak so—

"Happy were he could finish forth his fate
In some unhaunted desert, most obscure
From all societies, from love and hate
Of worldly folk; then might he sleep secure;
Then wake again, and ever give God praise,
Content with hips and haws and bramble-berry;
In contemplation spending all his days,
And change of holy thoughts to make him merry;
Where, when he dies, his tomb may be a bush,
Where harmless robin dwells with gentle thrush."'

'Is it that you are writing now, father?'

'Nay, indeed,' said he slowly, and a cloud came over his face. 'That was written by one that was my good friend in bygone days; by one that was betrayed and done to death by lying tongues, and had but sorry favour shown him in the end by those he had served.'

He turned away. She thought she heard

him say 'My noble Essex!' but she was mutely following him. And then he said—

'Come, lass; come pick me the berries!'

He kept walking up and down by himself, while her nimble fingers were busy with the bushes; and when she had collected a sufficiency of the fruit and brought it to him, she found that he appeared to be in no hurry this morning, but was now grown cheerful again, and rather inclined to talk to her. And she was far from telling him that her proper place at this moment was within-doors, to see that the maids were getting things forward: and if she bestowed a thought of any kind on the good parson, it was to the effect that both he and the dinner would have to wait. Her father had hold of her by the arm. He was talking to her of all kinds of things, as they slowly walked up and down the path—but of his friends in Stratford mostly, and their various ways of living: and this she conceived to have some reference to his project of withdrawing altogether from London and settling down for good amongst them. Indeed, so friendly and communicative was he on this clear morning—in truth, they were

talking like brother and sister—that when at last he went into the summer-house she made bold to follow; and when he chanced to look at some sheets lying on the table, she said—

'Father, what is the story of the man with the devices?'

For an instant he did not understand what she meant; then he laughed.

'Nay, pay you no heed to such things, child.'

'And why should not I, father, seeing that they bring you so great honour?'

'Honour, say you?'—but then he seemed to check himself. This was not Julius Shawe, to whom he could speak freely enough about the conditions of an actor's life in London. 'Well, then, the story is of a banished Duke, a man of great wisdom and skill, and he is living on a desert island with his daughter—a right fair maiden she is, too, and she has no other companion in the world but himself——'

'But he is kind to her and good?' she said quickly.

'Truly.'

'What other companion would she have, then? Is she not content—ay, and right well pleased withal?'

'Methinks the story would lag with but these,' her father said, with a smile. 'Would you not have her furnished with a lover—a young Prince and a handsome—one that would play chess with her, and walk with her, while her father was busy?'

'But how on a desert island? How should she find such an one?' Judith said—with her eyes all intent.

'There, you see, is where the magic comes in. What if her father have at his command a sprite, a goblin, that can work all wonders—that can dazzle people in the dark, and control the storm, and whistle the young Prince to the very feet of his mistress?'

Judith sighed, and glanced at the sheets lying on the table.

'Alas, good father, why did you aid me in my folly, and suffer me to grow up so ignorant?'

'Folly, fond wench!' said he, and he caught her by the shoulders, and pushed her out of the summer-house. 'Thank God you have

naught to do with any such stuff. There, go you and seek out Prudence, and get you into the fields, and give those pink roses in your cheeks an airing. Is't not a rare morning? And you would blear your eyes with books, silly wench? Get you gone—into the meadows with you—and you may gather me a nosegay if your fingers would have work.'

'I must go indoors, father; good Master Blaise is coming to dinner,' said she, 'but I will bring you the nosegay in the afternoon, so please you. So fare you well,' she added; and she glanced at him, 'and pray you, sir, be kind to the young Prince.'

He laughed and turned away; and she hurried quickly into the house. In truth, all through that day she had plenty to occupy her attention; but whether it was the maids that were asking her questions, or her mother seeking her help, or good Master Walter paying authoritative court to her, her eyes were entirely distraught. For they saw before them a strange island, with magic surrounding it, and two young lovers, and a grave and elderly man regarding them; and she grew to wonder how much more of that story was shut up in

the summer-house, and to lament her misfortune in that she could not go boldly to her father and ask him to be allowed to read it. She felt quite certain that, could she but sit down within there and peruse these sheets for herself he would not say her nay; and from that conclusion to the next—that on the first chance she would endeavour to borrow the sheets and have them read to her—was but an obvious step, and one that she had frequently taken before. Moreover, on this occasion, the chance came to her sooner than she could have expected. Towards dusk in the evening her father went out, saying that he was going along to see how the Harts were doing. Matthew gardener was gone home. The parson had left hours before, and her mother was in the brew-house and out of hearing. Finally, to crown her good fortune she discovered that the key had been left in the door of the summer-house; and so the next minute found her inside and on her knees.

It was a difficult task. There was scarcely any light, for she dared not leave the door open; and the mark that she put on the

sheets, to know which she had carried to Prudence, was minute. And yet the sheets seemed to have been tossed into this receptacle in fairly regular order; and when at length, and after much straining of her eyes, she had got down to the marked ones, she was rejoiced to find that there remained above these a large bulk of unperused matter; and the question was as to how much it would be prudent to carry off. Further, she had to discover where there was some kind of division, so that the story should not abruptly break off; and she had acquired some experience in this direction. In the end, the portion of the play that she resolved upon taking with her was modest and small; there would be the less likelihood of detection; and it was just possible that she would have no opportunity of returning the sheets that night.

And then she quickly got indoors, and put on her hood and muffler, and slipped out into the dusk. She found Prudence alone in the lower room, sitting sewing, the candles on the table being already lit; and some distance off, curled up and fast asleep on the floor, lay the little spaniel-gentle.

'Dear heart,' said Judith, brightly, as she glanced at the little dog, 'you have shown good sense after all; I feared me you would fall away from my wise counsel.'

'My brother was well inclined to the little creature,' Prudence said, with some embarrassment.

'And you had a right merry evening, I'll be bound,' Judith continued, blithely. 'And was there singing?—nay, he can sing well when he is in the mood—none better. Did he give you

> "*There is a garden in her face*
> *Where roses and white lilies grow*"

—for Julius is more light-hearted in such matters than you are, dear mouse. And was there any trencher-business?—and wine? I warrant me Julius would not have his guest sit dry-throated. 'Twas a merry evening, in good sooth, sweetheart?'

'They talked much together,' Prudence said, with her eyes cast down.

'*They* talked? Mercy on us, were you not civil to him? Did you not thank him prettily for the little spaniel?'

'In a measure I think 'twas Julius took the little creature from him,' Prudence said, bashfully.

'Beshrew me now, but you know better! —'twas given to you, you know right well: a spaniel-gentle for your brother — as soon would he think of a farthingale and a petticoat! And what did he say? Had he aught special to say to you, gossip?'

'He would have me look at an ancient book he had, with strange devices on the leaves,' Prudence said. 'Truly, 'twas strange and wonderful, the ornamentation of it in gold and colours, though I doubt me 'twas the work of monks and priests. He would have me take it from him,' she added, with a faint blush.

'And you would not, silly one?' Judith exclaimed, angrily.

'Would you have me place such Popish emblems alongside such a book as that that Dr. Hall gave me? Dear Judith, 'twould be a pollution, and a sin!'

'But you gave him thanks for the offer, then?'

'Of a surety; 'twas meant in friendship.'

'Well, well; right glad am I to see the little beast lying there; and methinks your gentleness hath cast a spell o'er it already, or 'twould not rest so soundly. And now, dear mouse, I have come to tax your patience once more: see, here is part of the new play; and we must go to your chamber, dear Prue, lest some one come in and discover us.'

Prudence laughed in her quiet fashion.

'I think 'tis you that casteth spells, Judith, else I should not be aiding thee in this perilous matter.'

But she took one of the candles in her hand nevertheless, and led the way upstairs; and then, when they had carefully bolted the door, Judith placed the roll of sheets on the table, and Prudence sate down to arrange and decipher them.

'But this time,' Judith said, 'have I less weight on my conscience, for my father hath already told me part of the story; and why should not I know the rest? Nay, but it promises well, I do assure thee, sweetheart; 'tis a rare beginning—the desert island, and the sprite that can work wonders, and the

poor banished Duke and his daughter. Ay, and there comes a handsome young Prince, too; marry, you shall hear of marvels! For the sprite is one that can work magic at the bidding of the Duke, and be seen like a fire in the dark, and can lead a storm whither he lists——'

'Tis with a storm that it begins,' Prudence said, for now she had arranged the sheets.

And instantly Judith was all attention. It is true, she seemed to care little for the first scene and the squabbles between the sailors and the gentlemen; she was anxious to get to the enchanted island; and when, at length, Prudence introduced Prospero and Miranda, Judith listened as if a new world were being slowly opened before her. And yet not altogether with silence; for sometimes she would utter a few words of quick assent, or even explanation; but always so as not to interfere with the gentle-voiced reader. By and by, when the banished Duke had come to the end of his story, and when he had caused slumber to fall upon his daughter's eyes, and was about to summon Ariel, Judith

interposed to give the patient reader a rest.

'And what say you, Prudence,' said she, eagerly. 'Is't not a beautiful story? Is she not a sweet and obedient maiden, and he a right noble and gentle father? Ah, there, now, they may talk about their masques and pageants of the Court, and gods and goddesses dressed up to saw the air with long speeches: see you what my father can tell you in a few words, so that you can scarcely wait but must on to hear the rest. And do I hurry you, good Prue? Will you to it again? For now the sprite is summoned that is to work the magic.'

'Indeed 'tis no heavy labour, Judith,' her friend said, with a smile. 'And now here is your Ariel.' She continued the reading.

'And hath he not done well, that clever imp!' Judith cried. 'Nay, but my father shall reward him — that he shall — 'twas bravely done and well. And now to bring the Prince to the maiden that hath never seen a sweetheart—that comes next, good Prue?—I marvel now what she will say?'

''Tis not yet, Judith,' her friend said, and

she went on with her task, while Judith sate and regarded the dusky shadows beyond the flame of the candle as if the wonder-world were shining there. Then they arrived at Ariel's song, 'Come unto these yellow sands,' and all the hushed air around seemed filled with music; but it was distant somehow, so that it did not interfere with Prudence's gentle voice.

'But would he take her away?' said Judith, presently (but to herself, as it were). 'Nay, never so! They must remain on the island—the two happy lovers—with Ariel to wait on them: surely my father will so make it?'

Then, as it appeared, came trouble to check the too swift anticipations of the Prince, though Judith guessed that the father of Miranda was but feigning in his wrath; and when Prudence finally came to the end of such sheets as had been brought her, and looked up, Judith's eyes were full of confidence and pride—not only because she was sure that the story would end happily, but also because she would have her chosen gossip say something about what she had read.

'Well?' said she.

''Tis a marvel,' Prudence said, with a kind of sigh, 'that shapes of the air can so take hold of us.'

Judith smiled; there was something in her manner that Prudence did not understand.

'And Master Jonson, good Prue—that they call Ben Jonson—what of him?'

'I know not what you mean, Judith.'

'Sure you know they make so much of him at the Court—and of his long speeches about Greece and Rome and the like—and when one comes into the country with news of what is going forward, by my life you'd think that Master Jonson were the only writer in the land! What say you, good Prue: could worthy Master Jonson invent you a scene like that?'

'In truth I know not, Judith; I never read aught of his writing.'

Judith took over the sheets and carefully rolled them up.

'Why,' said she, ''twas my father brought him forward; and had his first play taken in at the theatre!'

'But your father and he are great friends,

Judith, as I am told; why should you speak against him?'

'I speak against him?' said Judith, as she rose; and there was an air of calm indifference on her face. 'In truth I have naught to say against the good man. 'Tis well that the Court ladies are pleased with Demogorgons and such idle stuff; and 'tis passing well that he knows the trade. Now give ye good-night and sweet dreams, dear mouse; and good thanks, too, for the reading.'

But at the door below—Prudence having followed her with the candle—she turned and said, in a whisper—

'Now, tell me true, good cousin: think you my father hath ever done better than this magic island, and the sweet Miranda, and the rest?'

'You know I am no judge of such matters, Judith,' her friend answered.

'But, dear heart, were you not bewitched by it? Were you not taken away thither? Saw you not those strange things before your very eyes?'

'In good sooth, then, Judith,' said the other, with a smile, 'for the time being I

knew not that I was in Stratford town, nor in our own country of England either.'

Judith laughed lightly and quickly, and with a kind of pride too. And when she got home to her own room, and once more regarded the roll of sheets before bestowing them away in a secret place, there was a fine bravery of triumph in her eyes. 'Ben Jonson!' she said, but no longer with any anger—rather with a sovereign contempt. Then she locked up the treasure in her small cupboard of boxes, and went downstairs again to seek out her mother; and now her heart was quite recovered from its envy, and was beating warm and equably in its disposition towards all mankind; and her mind was full of a proud and perfect confidence. 'Ben Jonson!' she said.

CHAPTER IV.

BY THE RIVER.

The next morning she was unusually demure, and yet merry withal. In her own chamber, as she chose out a petticoat of pale blue taffeta, and laid on the bed her girdle of buff-coloured leather, and proceeded to array herself in these and other braveries, it was to the usual accompaniment of thoughtless and quite inconsequent ballad-singing. At one moment it was 'Green-sleeves was all my joy,' and again, 'Fair, fair, and twice so fair,' or perhaps—

> '*An ambling nag, and a-down, a-down,*
> *We have borne her away to Dargison.*'

But when she came to take forth from the cupboard of boxes the portion of the play she had locked up there the night before, and when she carefully placed that in a satchel

of dark blue velvet that she had attached to the girdle, she was silent; and when she went downstairs and encountered her mother there was a kind of anxious innocence on her face. The good parson (she explained) had remained so late on the previous afternoon, and there were so many things about the house she had to attend to, that she had been unable to get out into the fields, as her father had bade her, to bring him home some wild flowers. Besides, as every one knew, large dogs got weak in the hind legs if they were kept chained up too continuously; and it was absolutely necessary she should take Don Roderigo out for a run with her through the meadows if her father would permit.

'There be plenty of flowers in the garden, surely,' her mother said, who was busy with some leather hangings, and wanted help.

'But he would liefer have some of the little wildlings, good mother,' said Judith. 'That I know right well, for he is pleased to see them lying on the table before him; and sometimes, too, he puts the names of them in his writing.'

'How know you that?' was the immediate and sharp question.

'As I have heard, good mother,' Judith said, with calm equanimity.

And then she went to the small mirror to see that her gray velvet cap and starched ruff were all right.

'What can your father want with wild flowers if he is to remain the whole day at Warwick?' her mother said.

'Is my father going to Warwick?' she asked, quickly.

'If he be not already set forth.'

She glanced at the window; there was neither horse nor serving-man waiting there. And then she hastily went out and through the backyard into the garden, and there, sure enough, was her father, ready booted for the road, and giving a few parting directions to his bailiff.

'Well, wench,' he said, when he had finished with the man, 'what would you?'

She had taken from her purse all the money she could find there.

'Good father,' said she, 'will you do this errand for me at Warwick?'

'More vanities?' said he. 'I wonder you have no commissioner to despatch to Spain and Flanders. What is't then?—a muff of satin—a gimmal ring——'

'No, no, not so, father; I would have you buy for me a clasp-knife—as good a one as the money will get; and the cutler must engrave on the blade, or on the handle, I care not which, a message—an inscription, as it were—'tis but three words—*For Judith's Sweetheart.* Could you remember that, good father?—is't too much of a trouble?'

'How now?' said he. 'For whom do you wish me to bring you such a token?'

'Nay, sir,' said she, demurely, 'would you have me name names? The gift of a sweetheart to a sweetheart is a secret thing.'

'You are a mad wench,' said he (though doubtless he guessed for whom the knife was intended), and he called to Matthew gardener to go round and see if Master Shawe were not yet ready. 'But now I bethink me, child, I have a message for thee. Good Master Walter spoke to me yesternight about what much concerns him—and you.'

Instantly all her gay self-confidence van-

ished; she became confused, anxious, timid; and she regarded him as if she feared what his look or manner might convey.

'Yes, sir?' she said, in rather a low voice.

'Well, you know what the good man wishes,' her father said, 'and he speaks fairly, and reasoneth well. Your mother, too, would be right well pleased.'

'And you, sir?' she said, rather faintly.

'I?' said he. 'Nay, 'tis scarce a matter that I can say aught in. 'Tis for yourself to decide, wench; but were you inclined to favour the young parson I should be well pleased enough—indeed 'tis so—a good man and honest, as I take him to be—of fair attainment, and I know of none that bear him ill will, or have aught to say against him. Nay, if your heart be set that way, wench, I see no harm; you are getting on in years to be still in the unmarried state; and, as he himself says, there would be security in seeing you settled in a home of your own, and your future no longer open and undecided. Nay, nay, I see no harm. He reasons well.'

'But, father, know you why he would

have me become his wife?' Judith said, with a wild feeling overcoming her that she was drowning and must needs throw out her hands for help. 'Tis for no matter of affection that I can make out—or that he might not as well choose any other in the town—but 'tis that I should help him in his work—and—and—labour in the vineyard, as he saith. In truth I am all unfit for such a task—there be many another far better fitted than I; my mother must know that right well. There is little that I would not do to please her; but surely we might all of us have just as much of the good man's company without this further bond. But what say you, father? What is your wish?' she added, humbly. 'Perchance I could bring my mind to it if all were anxious that it should be so.'

'Why, I have told thee, wench, thou must choose for thyself. 'Twould please your mother right well, as I say; and as for the duties of a parson's wife—nay, nay, they are none so difficult. Have no fears on that score, good lass; I dare be sworn you are as honest and well-minded as most, though per-

chance you make less profession of it.' (The gratitude that sprang to her eyes, and shone there, in spite of her downcast face!) 'Nor must you think the good parson has but that end in view; 'tis not in keeping with his calling that he should talk the language of romances. Consider it, wench, consider. And there is more for you to think of. Even if Master Blaise be no vehement lover, as some of the young rattlepates might be, that is but a temporary thing; 'tis the long years of life that weigh for the most; and all through these you would be in an honourable station, well thought of and respected. Nay, there be many, I can tell thee, lass, that might look askance now at the player's daughter, who would be right glad to welcome the parson's wife.'

'What say you, father?' said she—and she was so startled that the blood forsook her lips for a moment. 'That—that—there be those—who scorn the player's daughter—and would favour the parson's wife?' And then she instantly added, 'I pray you, sir, did not you say that I was to decide for myself?'

'Truly, child, truly!' said he, somewhat wondering at her manner, for her face had grown quite pale.

'Then I have decided, father.'

'And how? What answer will you have for Master Walter?'

She spoke slowly now, and with a distinctness that was almost harsh.

'This, so please you, sir—that the player's daughter shall not, and shall never, become the parson's wife, God helping her!'

'Why, how now, what a coil is this!' he exclaimed. 'Good lass, 'twas not the parson that said aught of the kind. Lay not that to his charge, in fair honesty!'

'I have decided,' she said, proudly and coldly. 'Father, the horses are brought round—I can hear them. You will not forget the knife, and the message on the blade?'

He looked at her and laughed—but in a kindly way; and he took her by the shoulder.

'Nay, now, wench, thou shalt not throw over the good man for a matter that was none of his bringing forward. And why should you wish to have less than the respect of all your neighbours, all and sundry, what-

ever be their views? In good sooth I meant to speak for the parson, and not to harm him; and when I have more time I must undo the ill that I have done him. So soften your heart, you proud one, and be thankful for the honour he would do you, and think over it, and be civil and grateful.'

'Nay, I will be civil enough to the good minister,' said she, with a return to her ordinary placid humour, 'if he speak no more of making me his wife.'

'He will win you yet, for as stubborn as you are,' her father said, with a smile. 'He hath a rare gift of reason; do not say nay too soon, wench, lest you have to recall your words. Fare you well, lass, fare you well!'

'And forget not the knife, good father. "*With Judith's love*," or "*For Judith's Sweethcart*," or what you will.' And then she added, daringly: ''Tis for the young Prince Mamillius, if you must know, good sir.'

He was just going away, but this caused him to stop for a second; and he glanced at her with a curious kind of suspicion. But her eyes had become quite inscrutable. What-

ever of dark mischief was within them was not to be made out but by further questioning, and for that he had now no time. So she was left alone, mistress of the field, and rather inclined to laugh at her own temerity, until it occurred to her that now she could go leisurely forth for her stroll along the banks of the Avon, taking the great dog with her.

Indeed her anger was always short-lived. Or perhaps it was the feeling that this danger was got rid of—that the decision was taken, and the parson finally and altogether left behind her—that now raised her spirits. At all events, as she went along the thoroughfare and cheerfully greeted those that met her, the neighbours said 'twas little wonder that Master William Shakespeare's second daughter put off the choosing of a mate for herself, for that she seemed to grow younger and more winsome every day. And she knew all the children by name, and had a word for them—scolding or merry as the case might be—when that she passed them by; and what with the clear sunlight of the morning, and the fresher atmosphere as she got out of the town, it

seemed to herself as if all the air were filled with music.

> '*Then sigh not so, but let them go,*
> *And be you blithe and bonny,*'

she said or sang to herself; and she had not a trace of ill will in her mind against the parson (although she did not fail to recollect that she was a player's daughter); and she was admonishing the Don to take good care of her, for that phantom conspirators and such like evil creatures might be about. And so she got down to the river-side; but she did not cross; she kept along by the path that followed the windings of the stream, between the wide meadows and the luxurious vegetation that overhung the current.

This English-looking landscape was at its fairest on this fair morning, for some heavy rain in the night had washed the atmosphere clear; everything seemed sharp and luminous; and the rows of trees along the summits of the distant and low-lying hills were almost black against the white and blue sky. Nearer her all the foliage of the wide-branching elms was stirring and rustling before a soft west-

erly breeze ; the flooded river was of a tawny brown, while its banks were a wilderness of wild flowers between the stems of the stunted willows—straggling rose-bushes of white and red, tall masses of goose-grass all powdered over with cream-white blossom, a patch of fragrant meadow-sweet here and there, or an occasional blood-red poppy burning among the dark dull greens. And as for companions ? Well, she caught a glimpse of a brood of ducks sidling along by the reeds, and tried to follow them, but the bushes shut them out from her sight. A mare and her foal, standing under the cool shadow of the trees, gazed blankly at her as she passed. Farther off there were some shorn sheep in the meadows, but she could see no shepherd. The harsh note of the corn-crake sounded somewhere in the long grass ; and the bees were busy ; and now and again a blue-backed swallow would swoop by her and over the stream ; while all around there was a smell of clover sweetening the westerly wind. At this moment she convinced herself she bore no ill will at all against the good parson : only that she had it in her mind that she would be well content

to remain a player's daughter. Her condition, she imagined, was one that she did not desire to have bettered. Why, the air that touched her cheek was like velvet; and there could be nothing in the world fairer than the pink and white roses bestarring the bushes there; and the very pulse of her blood seemed to beat to an unheard and rhythmical and subtle tune. What was it her father had said? 'I dare be sworn you are as honest and well-minded as most, though perchance you make less profession of it.' She laughed to herself, with a kind of pride. And she was so well content that she wished she had little Willie Hart here that she might put her hand on his shoulder, and pet him, and convey to him some little of that satisfaction that reigned within her own bosom. No matter, he should have the clasp-knife—'*with Judith's love*,'—and right proud he would be of that, she made sure. And so she went idly on her way, sometimes with—

> '*Fair, fair, and twice so fair,*
> *And fair as any may be*,'

coming uncalled for into her head; and always

with an eye to the various wild flowers, to see what kind of a nosegay she would be able to gather on her homeward walk.

But by and by her glances began to go farther afield. Master Leofric Hope, in his brief references to his own habits and condition at the farm, had incidentally remarked that of all his walks abroad he preferred the following of the path by the river-side, for there he was most secure from observation. Nay, he said that sometimes, after continued solitude, a longing possessed him to see a town—to see a populated place filled with a fair number of his fellow-creatures—and that he would come within sight of Stratford itself and have a look at the church, and the church spire, and the thin blue smoke rising over the houses. That, he said, was safer for him than coming over such an exposed thoroughfare as Bardon Hill; and then again, when he was of a mind to read—for this time he had brought one or two books with him—he could find many a sheltered nook by the side of the stream, where even a passer-by would not suspect his presence. Nor could Judith, on this fresh, warm, breezy morning, conceal

from herself the true object of her coming forth. If she had tried to deceive herself the contents of the blue velvet satchel would have borne crushing testimony against her. In truth, she was now looking with some eagerness to find whether, on such a pleasant morning, it was possible that he could have remained within-doors, and with the very distinct belief that sooner or later she would encounter him.

Nor was she mistaken, though the manner of the meeting was unexpected. The mastiff happened to have gone on a yard or two in front of her, and she was paying but little attention to the beast, when all of a sudden it stopped, became rigid, and uttered a low growl. She sprang forward and seized it by the collar. At the same instant she caught sight of some one down by the water's edge, where, but for this occurrence, he would doubtless have escaped observation. It was Leofric Hope without a doubt; for now he was clambering up through the bushes, and she saw that he had a small book in his hand.

'My good fortune pursues me, fair Mistress Judith,' said he (but with a watchful eye

on the dog), 'that I should so soon again have an opportunity of meeting with you. But perchance your protector is jealous? He likes not strangers?'

'A lamb, sir, a very lamb!' Judith said, and she patted the dog, and coaxed him, and got him into a more friendly—or, at least, neutral and watchful—frame of mind.

'I marvel not you have come forth on such a morning,' said he, regarding the fresh colour in her face. ''Tis a rare morning, and 'tis a rare chance for one that is a prisoner, as it were, that his dungeon is not four walls, but the wide spaces of Warwickshire. Will you go farther? May I attend you?'

'Nay, sir,' said she, 'I but came forth to look at the country and see what blossoms I could carry back to my father. I will go as far as the stile there and rest a few minutes, and return.'

''Tis like your kindness, sweet lady, to vouchsafe me a moment's conversation; a book is but a dull companion,' said he, as they walked along to the stile that formed part of a boundary hedge. And when they reached it she seated herself on the wooden bar with much content, and the mastiff lay

down, stretching out his paws, while the young gentleman stood idly—but not carelessly—by. He seemed more than ever anxious to interest his fair neighbour, and so to beguile her into remaining.

'A dull companion,' he repeated, 'it is; one would rather hear the sound of one's voice occasionally. When I came along here this morning I should have been right glad even to have had a she shepherd say "Good-morrow" to me——'

'A what, good sir?' she asked.

He laughed.

'Nay, 'tis a book the wits in London have much merriment over just now—a guide-book for the use of foreigners coming to this country—and there be plenty of them at present, in the train of the ambassadors. Marry, the good man's English is none of the best. "*For to ask the way*" is a chapter of the book; and the one traveller says to the other, "*Ask of that she shepherd*"—in truth, the phrase hath been caught up by the town. But the traveller is of a pleasant and courteous turn; when that he would go to bed, he says to the chambermaid: "Draw the cur-

tains, and pin them with a pin. My she friend, kiss me once, and I shall sleep the better. I thank you, fair maiden." Well, their English may be none of the best, but they have a royal way with them, some of those foreigners that come to our Court. When the Constable of Castile was at the great banquet at Whitehall—doubtless you heard of it, sweet Mistress Judith?—he rose and drank the health of the Queen from a cup of agate of extraordinary value, all set with diamonds and rubies, and when the King had drunk from the same cup the Constable called a servant, and desired that the cup should be placed on his Majesty's buffet, to remain there: was't not a royal gift? And so likewise he drank the health of the King from a beautiful dragon-shaped cup of crystal all garnished with gold; but he drank from the cover only, for the Queen, standing up, drank the pledge from the cup itself; and then he would have that in turn transferred to her buffet, as he had given the other one to the King.'

'My father,' said she, with much complacent good-nature—for she had got into the

way of talking to this young gentleman with a marvellous absence of restraint or country shyness—'hath a tankard of great age and value, and on the silver top of it is a tribute engraved from many of his friends—truly, I would that you could come and see it, good sir—and—and—my father, too, he would make you welcome, I doubt not. And what book is it,' she continued, with a smile, 'that you have for companion, seeing that there be no she shepherd for you to converse withal?'

''Tis but a dull affair,' said he, scarce looking at it, for Judith's eyes were more attractive reading. 'And yet if the book itself be dull, there is that within its boards that is less so. Perchance you have not heard of one Master Browne, a young Devonshire gentleman, that hath but late come to London, and that only for a space, as I reckon?'

'No, sir——' she said, hesitatingly.

'The young man hath made some stir with his poems,' he continued, 'though there be none of them in the booksellers' hands as yet. And as it has been my good fortune to see one or two of them—marry, I am no judge, but I would call them excellent and of

much modesty and grace—I took occasion to pencil down a few of the lines, inside the cover of this little book. May I read them to you, Mistress Judith?'

'If it please you, good sir.'

He opened the book, and she saw that there were some lines pencilled on the gray binding; but they must have been familiar to him, for he scarce took his eyes from Judith's face as he repeated them.

'They are a description,' said he, 'of one that must have been fair indeed:

"*Her cheeks, the wonder of what eye beheld,*
Begot betwixt a lily and a rose,
In gentle rising plains divinely swelled,
Where all the graces and the loves repose.
Nature in this piece all her works excelled,
Yet showed herself imperfect in the close,
For she forgot (*when she so fair did raise her*)
To give the world a wit might duly praise her.

"*When that she spoke, as at a voice from heaven*
On her sweet words all ears and hearts attended:
When that she sung, they thought the planets seven
By her sweet voice might well their tunes have mended;
When she did sigh, all were of joy bereaven;
And when she smiled, heaven had them all befriended:
If that her voice, sighs, smiles, so many thrilled,
O, had she kissed, how many had she killed!"'

'Tis a description of a lady of the Court?' Judith asked, timidly.

'No, by heavens,' he said, with warmth, 'the bonniest of our English roses are they that grow in the country air!'—and his glance of admiration was so open and undisguised, and the application of his words so obvious, that her eyes fell, and, in spite of herself, the colour mounted to her cheeks. In her embarrassment she sought safety in the blue velvet satchel. She had contemplated some other way of introducing this latest writing of her father's; but now that had all fled from her brain. She knew that the town gentlemen were given to flattery; but then she was not accustomed to it. And she could not but swiftly surmise that he had written down these lines with the especial object of addressing them to her, when he should have the chance.

'Good sir,' said she, endeavouring to hide this brief embarrassment by assuming a merry air, 'a fair exchange, they say, is no robbery. Methinks you will find something here that will outweigh good Master Browne's verses—in bulk, if not in merit.'

He gazed in astonishment at the parcel of sheets she handed to him, and he but glanced at the first page when he exclaimed—

'Why, I have heard naught of this before.'

'Nay, sir,' said she, with a calm smile, 'the infant is but young—but a few weeks, as I take it—it hath had but little chance of making a noise in the world as yet? Will you say what you think of it?'

But now he was busy reading. Then by and by she recollected something of the manner in which she had meant to introduce the play.

'You see, sir, my father hath many affairs on his hands; 'tis not all his time he can give to such things. And yet I have heard that they be well spoken of in London—if not by the wits, perchance, or by the Court ladies, at least by the common people and the prentices. We in these parts have but little skill of learning; but—but methinks 'tis a pretty story—is it not, good sir?—and perchance as interesting as a speech from a goddess among the clouds?'

'In truth, it is a rare invention,' said he,

but absently, for his whole and rapt attention was fixed on the sheets.

She, seeing him so absorbed, did not interfere further. She sate still and content—perhaps with a certain sedate triumph in her eyes. She listened to the rustling of the elms overhead, and watched the white clouds slowly crossing the blue, and the tawny-hued river lazily and noiselessly stealing by below the bushes. The corn-crake was silent now—there was not even that interruption; and when the bell in the church-tower began to toll, it was so soft and faint and distant that she thought it most likely he would not even hear it. And at what point was he now? At the story of how the sweet Miranda came to grow up in exile? Or listening to Ariel's song? Or watching the Prince approach this new wonder of the magic island? Her eyes were full of triumph. 'Ben Jonson!' she had said.

But suddenly he closed the sheets together.

'It were unmannerly so to keep you waiting,' said he.

'Nay, heed not that, good sir,' she said,

instantly. 'I pray you go on with the reading. How like you it? 'Tis a pretty story, methinks; but my father hath been so busy of late—what with acres, and tithes, and sheep, and malt, and the like—that perchance he hath not given all his mind to it——'

'It is not for one such as I, fair Mistress Judith,' said he, with much modesty, 'to play the critic when it is your father's writing that comes forward. Beshrew me, there be plenty of that trade in London, and chiefly the feeble folk that he hath driven from our stage. No, sweet lady; rather consider me one of those that crowd to see each new piece of his, and are right thankful for aught he pleaseth to give us.'

'Is that so?' said she; and she regarded him with much favour, which he was not slow to perceive.

'Why,' said he, boldly, 'what needs your father to heed if some worshipful Master Scoloker be of opinion that the play of the Prince Hamlet belongeth to the vulgar sort, and that the Prince was but moon-sick; or that some one like Master Greene — God rest his soul, wherever it be!—should call

him an upstart crow, and a Johannes factotum, and the like? 'Tis what the people of England think that is of import; and right sure am I what they would say—that there is no greater writer than your father now living in the land.'

'Ah, think you so?' she said, quickly, and her face grew radiant, as it were, and her eyes were filled with gratitude.

'This Master Greene,' he continued, 'was ever jibing at the players, as I have heard, and bidding them be more humble, for that their labour was but mechanical, and them attracting notice through wearing borrowed plumes. Nay, he would have it that your father was no more than that—poor man, he lived but a sorry life, and 'twere ill done to cherish anger against him; but I remember to have seen the apology that he that published the book made thereafter to your father—in good truth, it was fitting and right that it should be printed and given to the world; and, though I forget the terms of it, 'twas in fair praise of Master William Shakespeare's gentle demeanour, and his uprightness of conduct, and the grace of his wit.'

'Could you get that for me, good sir?' said she, eagerly. 'Is't possible that I could get it?' And then she stopped in some embarrassment, for she remembered that it was not becoming she should ask this stranger for a gift. 'Nay, sir, 'twould be of little use to me, that have no skill of reading.'

'But I pray you, sweet Mistress Judith, to permit me to bring you the book—'twill be something, at least, for you to keep and show to your friends——'

'If I might show it to Prudence Shawe, I could return it to you, good sir,' said she; and then she added: 'Not that she—no, nor any one in Stratford town—would need any such testimony to my father's qualities, that are known to all.'

'At least they seem to have won him the love and loyalty of his daughter,' said he, gallantly; 'and they know most about a man who live nearest him. Nay, but I will beg you to accept the book from me when I can with safety get to London again; 'twill be a charge I am not likely to forget. And in return, fair Mistress Judith, I would take of you another favour, and a greater.'

'In what manner, gentle sir?'

'I have but glanced over this writing, for fear of detaining you, and but half know the value of it,' said he. 'I pray you let me have it with me to my lodging for an hour or two, that I may do it justice. When one hath such a chance come to him, 'tis not to be lightly treated; and I would give time and quiet to the making out the beauties of your father's latest work.'

She was at first somewhat startled by this proposal; and almost involuntarily was for putting forth her hand to receive the sheets again into safe keeping; but then she asked herself what harm there could be in acceding to his request. She was eagerly anxious that he should understand how her father—even amidst those multifarious occupations that were entailed on him by his prominent position in the town—could, when he chose, sit down and write a tale far exceeding in beauty and interest any of the mummeries that the Court people seemed to talk about. Why should not he have a few hours' time to study this fragment withal? Her father was gone to Warwick for the day. Nay,

more, she had taken so small a portion of what had been cast aside that she knew the absence of it would not be noticed, however long it might be kept. And then this young gentleman, who was so civil and courteous, and who spoke so well of her father, was alone, and to be pitied for that he had so few means of beguiling the tedium of his hiding.

'In the afternoon,' said he, seeing that she hesitated, 'I could with safety leave it at your grandmother's cottage; and then, perchance, you might send some one for it. Nay, believe me, sweet Mistress Judith, I know the value of that I ask; but I would fain do justice to such a treasure.'

'You would not fail me, sir, in leaving it at the cottage?' said she.

'You do me wrong, Mistress Judith, to doubt—in good sooth you do. If you can find a trusty messenger——'

'Nay, but I will come for it myself, good sir, and explain to my grandmother the nature of the thing, lest she suspect me of meddling with darker plots. Let it be so, then, good sir—for now I must get me back to the town.

I pray you, forget not to leave the package; and so—farewell!'

'But my thanks to you, dear lady——'

'Nay, sir,' said she, with a bright look of her eyes, 'bethink you you have not yet fairly made out the matter. Tarry till you have seen whether these sheets be worth the trouble—whether they remind you in aught of the work of your friend Master Jonson—and then your thanks will be welcome. Give ye good-day, gentle sir!'

There was no thought in her mind that she had done anything imprudent in trusting him with this portion of the play for the matter of an hour or two; it was but a small equivalent, she recollected, for his promise to bring her from London the retractation or apology of one of those who had railed at her father, or abetted in that, and found himself constrained by his conscience to make amends. And now it occurred to her that it would look ill, if, having come out to gather some wild flowers for the little table in the summer-house, she returned with empty hands; so, as she proceeded to walk leisurely along the winding path leading back to the

town, she kept picking here and there such blossoms as came within her reach. If the nosegay promised to be somewhat large and straggling, at least it would be sweet-scented; and she felt pretty sure that her father would be well content with it. At first she was silent, however; her wonted singing was abandoned; perchance she was trying to recall something of the lines that Master Leofric Hope had repeated to her—with so marked an emphasis.

'And what said he of our English roses?' she asked herself, with some faint colour coming into her face at the mere thought of it.

But then she forcibly dismissed these recollections—feeling that that was due to her own modesty—and busied herself with her blossoms and sprays; and presently, as she set out in good earnest for the town, she strove to convince herself that there was nothing more serious in her brain than the tune of Green-sleeves—

> *'Green-sleeves, now farewell, adieu,*
> *God I pray to prosper thee;*
> *For I am still thy lover true—*
> *Come once again and love me!'*

CHAPTER V.

WILD WORDS.

Her light-heartedness did not last long. In the wide clear landscape a human figure suddenly appeared, and the briefest turn of her head showed her that Tom Quiney was rapidly coming towards her across the fields. For a second her heart stood still. Had he been riding home from Ludington? Or from Bidford? Was it possible that he had come over Bardon Hill, and from that height espied the two down by the river? She could not even tell whether that was possible—or what he had done with his horse—or why he had not interfered sooner, if he was bent on interfering; but she had an alarmed impression that this rapid approach of his boded trouble, and she had not long to wait before that fear was confirmed.

'Judith, who is that man?' he demanded, with a fury that was but half held in.

She turned, and faced him.

'I knew not,' she said, coldly and slowly, 'that we were on a speaking platform.'

''Tis no time to bandy words,' said he—and his face was pale, for he was evidently striving to control the passion with which his whole figure seemed to quiver from head to heel. 'Who is that man, I ask? Who is he, that you come here to seek him, and alone?'

'I know not by what right you put such questions to me,' she said—but she was somewhat frightened.

'By what right? And you have no regard, then, for your good name?'

There was a flash in her eyes. She had been afraid: she was no longer afraid.

'My good name?' she repeated. 'I thank God 'tis in none of your keeping!'

In his madness he caught her by the wrist.

'You shall tell me——'

'Unhand me, sir!' she exclaimed, and she threw off his grasp, while her cheeks burned with humiliation.

'Nay, I quarrel not with women,' said he. 'I crave your pardon. But, by God, I will get to know that man's name and purpose here if I rive it from his body!'

So he strode off—in the direction that Leofric Hope had taken; and for a moment she stood quite terror-stricken and helpless, scarcely daring to think of what might happen. A murder on this fair morning? This young fellow, that was quite beside himself in his passion of jealous anger, was famed throughout the length and breadth of Warwickshire for his wrestling prowess. And the other—would he brook high words? These things flashed across her mind in one bewildering instant, and in her alarm she forgot all about her pride. She called to him.

'I pray you—stay!'

He turned and regarded her.

'Stay,' said she, with her face afire. 'I—I will tell you what I know of him—if you will have it so.'

He approached her—with seeming reluctance, and with anger and suspicion in his lowering look. He was silent, too.

'Indeed there is no harm,' said she (and still with her face showing her mortification that she was thus forced to defend herself). ''Tis a young gentleman that is in some trouble—his lodging near Bidford is also a hiding, as it were—and—and I know but little of him beyond his name, and that he is familiar with many of my father's friends in London.'

'And how comes it that you seek him out here, alone?' said he. 'That is a becoming and maidenly thing!'

'I promised you I would tell you what I know of the young gentleman,' said she, with scornful lips. 'I did not promise to stand still and suffer your insolence.'

'Insolence?' he exclaimed, as if her audacity bewildered him.

'How know you that I sought him out!' she said, indignantly. 'May not one walk forth of a summer morning without being followed by suspicious eyes—I warrant me, eyes that are only too glad to suspect! To think evil is an easy thing, it seems, with many: I wonder, sir, you are not ashamed!'

'You brave it out well,' said he, sullenly;

but it was evident that her courage had impressed him, if it still left him angered and suspicious.

And then he asked—

'How comes it that none of your friends or your family know aught of this stranger?'

'I marvel you should speak of my family,' she retorted. 'I had thought you were inclined to remain in ignorance of them of late. But had you asked of Prudence Shawe, she might have told you something of this young gentleman; or had you thought fit to call in at my grandmother's cottage, you might perchance have found him seated there, and a welcome guest at her board. Marry, 'tis easier far to keep aloof and to think evil, as one may see!'

And then she added—

'Well, sir, are you satisfied? May I go home without further threats?'

'I threatened you not, Judith,' said he, rather more humbly. 'I would have my threats kept for those that would harm you.'

'I know of none such,' she said distinctly. 'And as for this young gentleman—that is in misfortune—such as might happen to any

one—and not only in hiding, but having entrusted his secret to one or two of us that pity him and see no harm in him—I say it were a cruel and unmanly thing to spy out his concealment, or to spread the rumour of his being in the neighbourhood——'

'Nay, you need not fear that of me, Judith,' said he. 'Man to man is my way, when there is occasion. But can you marvel if I would have you for your own sake avoid any further meetings with this stranger? If he be in hiding let him remain there, in God's name; I for one will set no beagles to hunt him out. But as for you, I would have you hold aloof from such dangerous traps.'

'Good sir,' said she, 'I have my conduct in my own keeping, and can answer to those that have the guardianship of me.'

He did not reply to this rebuke. He said—

'May I walk back to the town with you, Judith?'

'You forget,' she said, coldly, 'that if we were seen together the gossips might say I had come out hither to seek you, and alone.'

But he paid no heed to this taunt.

'I care not,' said he, with an affectation of indifference, 'what the gossips in Stratford have to talk over. Stratford and I are soon to part.'

'What say you?' said she, quickly—and they were walking on together now, the Don leisurely following at their heels.

'Nay, 'tis nothing,' said he, carelessly: 'there are wider lands beyond the seas where a man can fight for his own and hold it.'

'And you?' said she. 'You have it in your mind to leave the country?'

'Marry, that have I!' said he, gaily. 'My good friend Daniel Hutt hath gotten together a rare regiment, and I doubt not I shall be one of the captains of them ere many years be over.'

Her eyes were downcast, and he could not see what impression this piece of news had made upon her—if, indeed, he cared to look. They walked for some time in silence.

'It is no light matter,' said she at length, and in rather a low voice, 'to leave one's native land.'

'As for that,' said he, 'the land will soon be not worth the living in. Why, in former

times, men spoke of the merry world of England. A merry world?—I trow the canting rogues of preachers have left but little merriment in it; and now they would seek to have all in their power, and to flood the land with their whining and psalm-singing, till we shall have no England left us, but only a vast conventicle. Think you that your father hath any sympathy with these? I tell you no; I take it he is an Englishman, and not a conventicle-man. 'Tis no longer the England of our fore-fathers, when men may neither hawk nor hunt, and women are doomed to perdition for worshipping the false idol starch, and the very children be called in from their games of a Sunday afternoon. God-a-mercy, I have had enough of Brother Patience-in-suffering, and his dominion of grace!'

This seemed to Judith a strange reason for his going away, for he had never professed any strong bias one way or the other in these religious dissensions; his chief concern, like that of most of the young men in Stratford, lying rather in the direction of butt-shooting, or wrestling, or having a romp

with some of the wenches to the tune of Packington's Pound.

'Nay, as I hear,' said he, 'there be some of them in such discontent with the King and the Parliament that they even talk of transplanting themselves beyond seas, like those that went to Holland: 'twere a goodly riddance if the whole gang of the sour-faced hypocrites went, and left to us our own England. And a fair beginning for the new country across the Atlantic—half of them these puritanical rogues, with their fastings and preachments; and the other half the constable's brats and broken men that such as Hutt are drafting out: a right good beginning, if they but keep from seizing each other by the throat in the end! No matter: we should have our England purged of the double scum!'

'But,' said Judith, timidly, 'methought you said you were going out with these same desperate men?'

'I can take my life in my hand as well as another,' said he, gloomily; and then he added: 'They be none so desperate, after all. Broken men there may be amongst

them, and many against whom fortune would seem to have a spite; perchance their affairs may mend in the new country.'

'But your affairs are prosperous,' Judith said—though she never once lifted her eyes. 'Why should you link yourself with such men as these?'

'One must forth to see the world,' said he; and he went on to speak in a gay and reckless fashion of the life that lay before him, and of its possible adventures and hazards and prizes. 'And what,' said he, 'if one were to have good fortune in that far country, and become rich in land, and have good store of corn and fields of tobacco; what if one were to come back in twenty years' time to this same town of Stratford, and set up for the trade of gentleman?'

'Twenty years?' said she, rather breathlessly. ''Tis a long time; you would find changes.'

'None that would matter much, methinks,' said he, indifferently.

'There be those that will be sorry for your going away,' she ventured to say—and she forced herself to think only of Prudence Shawe.

'Not one that will care a cracked three-farthings!' was the answer.

'You do ill to say so—indeed you do!' said she, with just a touch of warmth in her tone. 'You have many friends; you serve them ill to say they would not heed your going.'

'Friends?' said he. 'Yes, they will miss me at the shovel-board, or when there is one short at the catches.'

'There be others than those,' said she, with some little hesitation.

'Who, then?' said he.

'You should know yourself,' she answered. 'Think you that Prudence, for one, will be careless as to your leaving the country?'

'Prudence?' said he, and he darted a quick glance at her. 'Nay, I confess me wrong there; for there is one that hath a gentle heart, and is full of kindness.'

'Right well I know that—for who should know better than I?' said Judith. 'As true a heart as any in Christendom, and a prize for him that wins it, I warrant you. If it be not won already,' she added, quickly. 'As to that, I know not.'

They were now nearing the town—they could hear the dull sound of the mill, and before them was the church spire among the trees, and beyond that the gray and red huddled mass of houses, barns, and orchards.

'And when think you of going?' she said, after a while.

'I know not, and I care not,' said he, absently. 'When I spoke of my acquaintances being indifferent as to what might befall me, I did them wrong, for in truth there be none of them as indifferent as I am myself.'

''Tis not a hopeful mood,' said she, 'to begin the making of one's fortunes in a new country withal. I pray you, what ails this town of Stratford, that you are not content?'

'It boots not to say, since I am leaving it,' he answered. 'Perchance in times to come, when I am able to return to it, I shall be better content. And you?'

'And I?' she repeated, with some surprise.

'Nay, you will be content enough,' said he, somewhat bitterly. 'Mother church will have a care of you. You will be in the fold

by then. The faithful shepherd will have a charge over you to keep you from communication with the children of anger and the devil, that rage without like lions seeking to destroy.'

'I know not what you mean,' said she, with a hot face.

'Right well you know,' said he, coolly; but there was an angry resentment running through his affected disdain as he went on: 'There be those that protest, and go forth from the church. And there be those that protest, and remain within—eating the fat things, and well content with the milk and the honey, and their stores of corn and oil. Marry, you will be well provided for—the riches of the next world laid up in waiting for you; and a goodly share of the things of this world to beguile the time withal. Nay, I marvel not; 'tis the wisdom of the serpent along with the innocence of the dove. What matters the surplice, the cross in baptism, and the other relics of Popery, if conformity will keep the larder full? Better that than starvation in Holland, or seeking a home beyond the Atlantic — where belike the

children of the devil might prove over-rude companions! I marvel not, I; 'tis a foolish bird that forsakes a warm nest.'

And now she well knew against whom his bitter speech was levelled; and some recollection of the slight he had put upon her in the churchyard came into her mind, with the memory that it had never been atoned for. And she was astounded that he had the audacity to walk with her now and here, talking as if he were the injured one. The sudden qualm that had filled her heart when he spoke of leaving the country was put aside; the kindly reference to Prudence was forgotten; she only knew that this sarcasm of his was very much out of place, and that this was far from being the tone in which he had any right to address her.

'I know not,' said she, stiffly, 'what quarrel you may have with this or that section of the church; but it concerns me not. I pray you attack those who are better able to defend themselves than I am, or care to be. Methinks your studies in that line have come somewhat late.'

''Tis no greater marvel,' said he, 'than

that you should have joined yourself to the assembly of the saints: it was not always so with you.'

'I?' she said; but her cheeks were burning, for well she knew that he referred to his having seen her with the parson on that Sunday morning, and she was far too proud to defend herself. 'Heaven help me, now, but I thought I was mistress of my own actions!'

'In truth you are, Mistress Judith,' said he, humbly (and this was the first time that he had ever addressed her so, and it startled her, for it seemed to suggest a final separation between them—something as wide and irrevocable as that twenty years of absence beyond the seas). And then he said: 'I crave your pardon if I have said aught to offend you, and would take my leave.'

'God be wi' you,' said she, civilly; and then he left—striking across the meadows towards the Bidford road, and, as she guessed, probably going to seek his horse from whomsoever he had left it with.

And as she went on and into the town she was wondering what Prudence had said

to him that should so suddenly drive him to think of quitting the country. All had seemed going well. As for Master Leofric Hope, his secret was safe; this late companion of hers seemed to have forgotten him altogether in his anger against the good parson. And then she grew to think of the far land across the ocean that she had heard vaguely of from time to time, and to think how twenty years could be spent there, and what Stratford would be like when that long space was over.

'Twenty years,' she said to herself, with a kind of sigh. 'There are many things will be settled ere that time be passed, for good or ill.'

CHAPTER VI.

A CONJECTURE.

When she got back to New Place she found the house in considerable commotion. It appeared that the famous divine, Master Elihu Izod, had just come into the town, being on his way towards Leicestershire, and that he had been brought by the gentleman whose guest he was to pay a visit to Judith's mother. Judith had remarked ere now that the preachers and other godly persons who thus honoured the New Place generally made their appearance a trifling time before the hour of dinner; and now, as she reached the house, she was not surprised to find that Prudence had been called in to entertain the two visitors—who were at present in the garden — while within-doors her mother and the maids were hastily making such preparations as were possible. To this latter work

she quickly lent a helping hand; and in due course of time the board was spread with a copious and substantial repast, not forgetting an ample supply of wine and ale for those that were that way inclined. Then the two gentlemen were called in; Prudence was easily persuaded to stay; and, after a lengthened grace, the good preacher fell to, seasoning his food with much pious conversation.

At such times Judith had abundant opportunities for reverie, and for a general review of the situation of her own affairs. In fact, on this occasion, she seemed in a manner to be debarred from participation in these informal services at the very outset. Master Izod, who was a tall, thin, dark, melancholy-visaged man—unlike his companion Godfrey Buller, of the Leas, near to Hinckley, who, on the contrary, was a stout yeoman-like person, whose small gray absent eyes remained motionless and vacant in the great breadth of his rubicund face—had taken for his text, as it were, a list he had found somewhere or other of those characters that were entitled to command the admiration and respect of all good people. These were: a young saint;

an old martyr ; a religious soldier ; a conscionable statesman ; a great man courteous ; a learned man humble ; a silent woman ; a merry companion without vanity ; a friend not changed with honour ; a sick man cheerful ; a soul departing with comfort and assurance. And as Judith did not make bold to claim to be any one of these—nor, indeed, to have any such merits or excellences as would extort the approval of the membership of the saints—she gradually fell away from listening ; and her mind was busy with other things ; and her imagination, which was vivid enough, intent upon other scenes. One thing that had struck her the moment she had returned was that Prudence seemed in an unusually cheerful mood. Of course, the arrival of two visitors was an event in that quiet life of theirs ; and no doubt Prudence was glad to be appointed to entertain the strangers—one of them, moreover, being of such great fame. But so pleased was she, and so cheerful in her manner, that Judith was straightway convinced there had been no quarrel between her and Tom Quiney. Nay, when was there time for that ? He could scarcely have seen

her that morning; while the night before there had certainly been no mention of his projected migration to America, else Prudence would have said as much. What, then, had so suddenly driven him to the conclusion that England was no longer a land fit to live in? And why had he paid Prudence such marked attention—why had he presented her with the spaniel-gentle and offered her the emblazoned missal—one evening, only to resolve the next morning that he must needs leave the country? Nay, why had he so unexpectedly broken the scornful silence with which he had recently treated herself? He had given her to understand that, as far as he was concerned, she did not exist. He seemed determined to ignore her presence. And yet she could not but remember that, if this contemptuous silence on his part was broken by the amazement of his seeing her in the company of a stranger, his suspicions in that direction were very speedily disarmed. A few words, and they fled. It was his far more deadly jealousy of the parson that remained, and was like to remain; for she certainly would not stoop to explain that the meeting

in the churchyard was quite accidental. But why should he trouble his head about either her or the parson? Had he not betaken himself elsewhere—and that with her right good will? Nay, on his own confession, he had discovered how kind and gentle Prudence was: there was a fit mate for him—one to temper the wildness and hot-headedness of his youth. Judith had never seen the sea, and therefore had never seen moonlight on the sea; but the nearest to that she could go, in thinking of what Prudence's nature was like, in its restful and sweet and serious beauty, was the moonlight she had seen on the river Avon, in the calm of a summer's night, the water unbroken by a ripple, and not a whisper among the reeds. Could he not perceive that, too, and understand?

As for herself, she knew that she could at any moment cut the knot of any complications that might arise by allowing Master Walter to talk her over into marrying him. Her father had assured her that the clear-headed and energetic young parson was quite equal to that. Well, it was about time she should abandon the frivolities and coquetries of her

youth; and her yielding would please many good people, especially her mother and sister; and obtain for herself a secure and established position, with an end to all these quarrels, and jealousies, and uncertainties. Moreover, there would be safety there. For, if the truth must be told, she was becoming vaguely and uncomfortably conscious that her relations with this young gentleman who had come secretly into the neighbourhood were no longer what they had been at first. Their friendship had ripened rapidly; for he was an audacious person, with plenty of self-assurance; and, with all his professions of modesty, and deference, he seemed to know very well that he could make his society agreeable. Then those lines he had repeated: why, her face grew warm now as she thought of them. She could not remember them exactly, but she remembered their purport; and she remembered, too, the emphasis with which he had declared that the bonniest of our English roses were those that grew in the country air. Now a young man cut off from his fellows as he was might well be grateful for some little solace of companionship, or for

this or the other little bit of courtesy; but he need not (she considered) show his gratitude just in that way. Doubtless, his flattery might mean little; the town gentlemen, she understood, talked in that strain; and perhaps it was only by an accident that the verses were there in the book; but still she had the uneasy feeling that there was something in his manner and speech that, if encouraged, or suffered to continue without check, might lead to embarrassment. That is to say, if she continued to see him; and there was no need for that. She could cut short this acquaintance the moment she chose. But on the one hand she did not wish to appear uncivil; and on the other she was anxious that he should see the whole of this play that her father had written—thrown off, as it were, amid the various cares and duties that occupied his time. If Master Leofric Hope talked of Ben Jonson when he came into the country, she would have him furnished with something to say of her father when he returned to town.

These were idle and wandering thoughts; and in one respect they were not quite honest.

In reality she was using them to cloak and hide, or to drive from her mind altogether, a suspicion that had suddenly occurred to her that morning, and that had set her brain afire in a wild way. It was not only the tune of Green-sleeves that was in her head as she set off to walk home, though she was trying to force herself to believe that. The fact is this: when Master Leofric Hope made the pretty speech about the country roses he accompanied it, as has been said, by a glance of only too out-spoken admiration; and there was something in this look—apart from the mere flattery of it—that puzzled her. She was confused, doubtless; but in her confusion it occurred to her that she had met that too eloquent glance somewhere before. She had no time to pursue this fancy further; for, in order to cover her embarrassment, she had betaken herself to the sheets in her satchel; and thereafter she was so anxious that he should think well of the play that all her attention was fixed on that. But after leaving him, and having had a minute or two to think over what had happened, she recalled that look, and wondered why there should be something

strange in it. And then a startling fancy flashed across her mind—the wizard! Was not that the same look—of the same black eyes—that she had encountered up at the corner of the field above the Wier Brake?—a glance of wondering admiration, as it were? And if these two were one and the same man? Of course, that train being lit ran rapidly enough: there were all kinds of parallels—in the elaborate courtesy, in the suave voice, in the bold and eloquent eyes. And she had no magical theory to account for the transformation—it did not even occur to her that the wizard could have changed himself into a young man—there was no dismay or panic in that direction—she instantly took it for granted that it was the young man who had been personating the wizard. And why?—to what end, if this bewildering possibility were to be regarded for an instant? The sole object of the wizard's coming was to point out to her her future husband. And if this young man were himself the wizard? A trick to entrap her?

Ariel himself could not have flashed

from place to place more swiftly than this wild conjecture; but the next moment she had collected herself. Her common-sense triumphed. She bethought her of the young man she had just left — of his respectful manners — of the letter he had brought for her father — of the circumstances of his hiding. It was not possible that he had come into the neighbourhood for the deliberate purpose of making a jest of her. Did he look like one that would play such a trick; that would name himself as her future husband; that would cozen her into meeting him? She felt ashamed of herself for harbouring such a thought for a single instant. Her wits had gone wool-gathering! Or was it that Prudence's fears had so far got hold of her brain that she could not regard the young man but as something other than an ordinary mortal? In fair justice, she would dismiss this absurd surmise from her mind forthwith; and so she proceeded with her gathering of the flowers; and when she did set forth for home, she had very nearly convinced herself that there was nothing in her head but the tune of Green-sleeves. Nay,

she was almost inclined to be angry with Prudence for teaching her to be so suspicious.

Nevertheless, during this protracted dinner, while good Master Izod was enlarging upon the catalogue of persons worthy of honour and emulation, Judith was attacked once more by the whisperings of the demon. For a while she fought against these, and would not admit to herself that any further doubt remained in her mind; but when at last she found herself, despite herself, going back and back to that possibility, she took heart of grace and boldly faced it. What if it were true? Supposing him to have adopted the disguise, and passed himself off as a wizard, and directed her to the spot where she should meet her future husband—what then? What ought she to do? How ought she to regard such conduct? As an idle frolic of youth? Or the device of one tired of the loneliness of living at the farm, and determined at all hazards to secure companionship? Or a darker snare still—with what ultimate aims she could not divine? Or again (for she was quite frank) if this were merely some one who

had seen her from afar, at church or fair or market, and considered she was a good-looking maid, and wished to have further acquaintance, and could think of no other method than this audacious prank? She had heard of lovers' stratagems in plenty; she knew of one or two of such that had been resorted to in this same quiet town of Stratford. And supposing that this last was the case, ought she to be indignant? Should she resent his boldness in hazarding such a stroke to win her? And then, when it suddenly occurred to her that, in discussing this possibility, she was calmly assuming that Master Leofric Hope was in love with her—he never having said a word in that direction, and being in a manner almost a stranger to her—she told herself that no audacity on his part could be greater than this on hers; and that the best thing she could do would be to get rid once and for ever of such unmaidenly conjectures. No; she would go back to her original position. The facts of the case were simple enough. He would have brought no letter to her father had he been bent on any such fantastic enterprise. Was it likely he

would suffer the thraldom of that farmhouse, and live away from his friends and companions, for the mere chance of a few minutes' occasional talk with a Stratford wench? As for the similarity between his look and that of the wizard, the explanation lay no doubt in her own fancy, which had been excited by Prudence's superstitious fears. And if in his courtesy he had applied to herself the lines written by the young Devonshire poet—well, that was but a piece of civility and kindness for which she ought to be more than usually grateful, seeing that she had not experienced too much of that species of treatment of late from one or two of her would-be suitors.

She was awakened from these dreams by the conversation suddenly ceasing; and in its place she heard the more solemn tones of the thanksgiving offered up by Master Izod:

'The God of glory and peace, who hath created, redeemed, and presently fed us, be blessed for ever and ever. So be it. The God of all power, who hath called from death that great pastor of the sheep, our Lord Jesus, comfort and defend the flock which he hath redeemed by the blood of the eternal testament; increase the number of true preachers; repress the rage

of obstinate tyrants; mitigate and lighten the hearts of the ignorant; relieve the pains of such as be afflicted, but specially of those that suffer for the testimony of thy truth; and finally, confound Satan by the power of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.'

And then, as the travellers were continuing their journey forthwith, they proposed to leave; and Master Buller expressed his sorrow that Judith's father had not been at home to have made the friendship of a man so famous as Master Izod; and the good parson, in his turn, as they departed, solemnly blessed the house and all that dwelt therein, whether present or absent. As soon as they were gone Judith besought her mother for the key of the summer-house, for she wished to lay on her father's table the wild flowers she had brought; and, having obtained it, she carried Prudence with her into the garden; and there they found themselves alone, for goodman Matthew had gone home for his dinner.

'Dear mouse,' said she, quickly, 'what is it hath happened to Tom Quiney?'

'I know not, Judith,' the other said, in some surprise.

'It is in his mind to leave the country!'

'I knew not that.'

'I dare be sworn you did not, sweetheart,' said she, 'else surely you would have told me. But why? What drives him to such a thing? His business prospers well, as I hear them say; and yet must he forsake it for the company of those desperate men that are going away to fight the Indians beyond seas. Nothing will content him. England is no longer England; Stratford is no longer Stratford: mercy on us, what is the meaning of it all?'

'In truth I know not, Judith.'

Then Judith glanced at her.

'Good cousin, I fear me you gave him but a cold welcome yesternight.'

'I welcomed him as I would welcome any of my brother's friends,' said Prudence, calmly and without embarrassment.

'But you do not understand!' Judith said, with a touch of impatience. 'Bless thy heart, young men are such strange creatures; and must have all to suit their humours; and are off and away in their peevish fits if you do not entertain them, and cringe, and say your worship to every sirrah of them! Oh, they

be mighty men of valour in their own esteem ; and they must have us poor handmaidens do them honour ; and if all be not done to serve, 'tis boot and spur and off to the wars with them, and many a fine tale thereafter about the noble ladies that were kind to them abroad. Marry, they can crow loud enough ; 'tis the poor hens that durst never utter a word ; and all must give way before his worship ! What, then ? What did you do ? Was not the claret to his liking ? Did not your brother offer him a pipe of Trinidado ? '

' Indeed, Judith, it cannot be through aught that happened last night, if he be speaking of leaving the country,' Prudence said. ' I thought he was well content, and right friendly in his manner.'

' But you do not take my meaning,' Judith said. ' Dear heart, bear me no ill will ; but I would have you a little more free with your favours. You are too serious, sweet mouse ; could you not pluck up a little of the spirit that the pretty Rosalind showed—do you remember ?—when she was teasing Orlando in the forest ? In truth these men are fond of a varying mood ; when they play with a

kitten they like to know it has claws. And again, if you be too civil with them, they presume, and would become the master all at once; and then must everything be done to suit their lordships' fantasies, or else 'tis up and away with them, as this one goes.'

'I pray you, Judith,' her friend said, and now in great embarrassment, 'forbear to speak of such things; in truth my heart is not set that way. Right well I know that if he be leaving the country 'tis through no discontent with me—nor that he would heed in any way how I received him. Nay, 'tis far otherwise; it is no secret whom he would choose for wife: if you are sorry to hear of his going away from his home you know that a word from you would detain him.'

'Good mouse, the folly of such thoughts!' Judith exclaimed. 'Why, when he will not even give me a "good-day to you, wench!"'

'You best know what reasons he had for his silence, Judith; I know not.'

'Reasons?' said she, with some quick colour coming to her face. 'We will let that alone, good gossip. I meddle not with any man's reasons, if he choose to be uncivil to

me; God help us, the world is wide enough for all!'

'Did you not anger him, Judith, that he is going away from his home and his friends?'

'Anger him? Perchance his own suspicions have angered him!' was the answer; and then she said, in a gentler tone: 'But in truth, sweetheart, I hope he will change his mind. Twenty years—for so he speaks—is a long space to be away from one's native land; there would be many changes ere he came back. Twenty years, he said.'

Judith rather timidly looked at her companion; but indeed there was neither surprise nor dismay depicted on the pale and gentle face. Her eyes were absent, it is true; but they did not seem to crave for sympathy.

''Tis strange,' said she, 'he said naught of such a scheme last night, though he and Julius spoke of this very matter of the men who were preparing to cross the seas. I know not what can have moved him to such a purpose.'

'Does he imagine, think you,' said Judith, 'that we shall all be here awaiting him at the

end of twenty years, and as we are now? Or is he so sure of his own life?—they say there is great peril in the new lands they have taken possession of beyond sea, and that there will be many a bloody fight ere they can reap the fruit of their labours in peace. Nay, I will confess to thee, sweet mouse, I like not his going. Old friends are old friends, even if they have wayward humours; and fain would I have him remain with us here in Stratford—ay, and settled here, moreover, with a sweet Puritan wife by his side, that at present must keep everything hidden. Well, no matter,' she continued, lightly. 'I seek no secrets—except those that be in the oaken box within here.'

She unlocked the door of the summer-house, and entered, and put the flowers on the table.

'Tell me, Prue,' said she, 'may we venture to take some more of the play, or must I wait till I have put back the other sheets?'

'You have not put them back?'

'In truth, no,' said Judith, carelessly. 'I lent them to the young gentleman, Leofric Hope.'

'Judith!' her friend exclaimed, with frightened eyes.

'What, then?'

'To one you know nothing of? You have parted with these sheets—that are so valuable?'

'Nay, nay, good gossip,' said she, 'you know the sheets are cast away as useless. And I but lent them to him for an hour or two, to lighten the tedium of his solitude. Nor was that all, good Prue, if I must tell thee the truth: I would fain have him know that my father can do something worth speaking of, as well as his friend Ben Jonson, and perchance even better: what think you?'

'You have seen him again, then?—this morning?'

'Even so,' Judith answered, calmly.

'Judith, why will you run into such danger?' her friend said, in obvious distress. 'In truth I know not what 'twill come to. And now there is this further bond in this secret commerce—think you that all this can remain unknown? Your meeting with him must come to some one's knowledge—indeed it must, sweetheart.'

'Nay, but this time you have hit the mark,' said Judith, complacently. 'If you would assure yourself, good Prue, that the young gentleman is no grisly ghost or phantom, methinks you could not do better than ask Tom Quiney, who saw him this very morning—and saw us speaking together, as I guess.'

'He saw you?' Prudence exclaimed. 'And what said he?'

'He talked large and wild for a space,' said Judith, coolly, 'but soon I persuaded him there was no great harm in the stranger gentleman. In sooth his mind was so full of his own affairs—and so bitter against all preachers, ministers, and pastors—and he would have it that England was no longer fit to live in—marry, he told me so many things in so few minutes that I have half forgotten them!'

And then it suddenly occurred to her that this fantasy that had entered her mind in the morning, and that had haunted her during Master Elihu Izod's discourse, would be an excellent thing with which to frighten Prudence. 'Twas but a chimera, she assured

herself; but there was enough substance in it for that. And so, when she had carefully arranged the flowers on the table, and cast another longing look at the oaken chest, she locked the door of the summer-house, and put her arm within the arm of her friend, and led her away for a walk in the garden.

'Prudence,' said she, seriously, 'I would have you give me counsel. Some one hath asked me what a young maiden should do in certain circumstances that I will put before you; but how can I tell—how can I judge of anything, when my head is in a whirligig of confusion with parson's arguments, and people leaving the country, and I know not what else? But you, good mouse—your mind is ever calm and equable—you can speak sweet words in Israel—you are as Daniel that was so excellent a judge even in his youth——'

'Judith!' the other protested; but indeed Judith's eyes were perfectly grave and apparently sincere.

'Well, then, sweetheart, listen: let us say that a young man has seen a young maiden that is not known to him but by name—perchance at church it may have been, or as she

was walking home to her own door. And there may be reasons why he should not go boldly to her father's house, though he would fain do so; his fancy being taken with her in a small measure, and he of a gentle disposition, and ready to esteem her higher than she deserved. And again it might be that he wished for private speech with her—to judge of her manners and her inclinations—before coming publicly forward to pay court to her: but alack, I cannot tell the story as my father would; 'tis the veriest skeleton of a story; and I fear me you will scarce understand. But let us say that the young man is bold and ingenious, and bethinks him of a stratagem whereby to make acquaintance with the damsel. He writes to her as a wizard that has important news to tell her; and begs her to go forth and meet him; and that on a certain morning he will be awaiting her at such and such a place. Now this maiden that I am telling you of has no great faith in wizards, but being curious to see the juggling, she goes forth to meet him as he asks——'

'Judith, I pray you, speak plain; what

is't you mean?' Prudence exclaimed; for she had begun to suspect.

'You must listen, good cousin, before you can give judgment,' said Judith, calmly; and she proceeded: 'Now you must understand that it was the young gentleman himself whom she met, though she knew it not; for he had dressed himself up as an ancient wizard, and he had a solemn manner, and Latin speech, and what not. Then says the wizard to her, I can show you the man that is to be your lover and sweetheart and husband; that will win you and wear you in the time coming; and if you would see him go to such and such a cross-road and he will appear. Do you perceive, now, good Prue, that it was a right safe prophecy, seeing that he had appointed himself to be the very one who should meet her?'

Prudence had gradually slipped her arm away from that of her friend, and now stood still, regarding her breathlessly; while Judith, with eyes quite placid and inscrutable, continued her story.

''Twas a noteworthy stratagem, and successful withal; for the maiden goes to the

cross-road, and there she meets the young gentleman—now in his proper costume. But she has no great faith in magic; she regards him not as a ghost summoned by the wizard; she would rather see in this meeting an ordinary accident, and the young man, being most courteous and modest and civil-spoken, they become friends. Do you follow the story? You see, Prudence, there is much in his condition to demand sympathy and kindness—he being in hiding, and cut off from his friends; and she, not being too industrious, and fond rather of walking in the meadows and the like, meets him now here, now there, but with no other thought than friendliness. I pray you, bear that in mind, sweetheart; for though I esteem her not highly, yet would I do her justice: there was no thought in her mind but friendliness, and a wish to be civil to one that seemed grateful for any such communion. And then, one morning, something happens—beshrew me if I can tell thee how it happened, and that is the truth—but something happens—an idea jumps into her head—she suspects that this young gentleman is no other than the

same who was the wizard, and that she has been entrapped by him, and that he, having played the wizard, would now fain play the lover——'

'Judith, is't possible? Is't possible?'

'Hold, cousin, hold; your time is not yet. I grant you 'tis a bold conjecture, and some would say not quite seemly and becoming to a maiden, seeing that he had never spoken any word to her of the kind; but there it was in her head—the suspicion that this young gentleman had tricked her, for his own amusement, or perchance to secure her company. Now, sweet judge in Israel, for your judgment! And on two points, please you. First, supposing this conjecture to be false, how is she to atone to the young gentleman? And how is she to punish herself? And how is she to be anything but uneasy should she chance to see him again? Nay more, how is she to get this evil suspicion banished from her mind, seeing that she dare not go to him and confess, and beg him for the assurance that he had never heard of the wizard? Then the second point: supposing the conjecture to be true, ought she to be very indignant?

How should she demean herself? Should she go to him and reproach him with his treachery? She would never forgive it, dear mouse, would she, even as a lover's stratagem?'

'Judith, I cannot understand you: I cannot understand how you can even regard such a possibility and remain content and smiling——'

'Then I ought to be indignant?—good cousin, I but asked for your advice!' Judith said. 'I must be angry; I must fret and fume, and use hot language, and play the tragedy part? In good sooth, when I think on't, 'twas a piece of boldness to put himself forward as my future husband—it was indeed—though 'twas cunningly contrived. Marry, but I understand now why my goodman wizard would take no money from me; 'twas myself that he would have in payment of his skill: and "gracious lady" and "sweet lady"—these were the lures to lead me on; and his shepherd's dial placed on the ground! Then off go beard and cloak; and a couple of days thereafter he is a gay young gallant; and "sweet lady" it is again—or "fair lady,"

was't ?—"know you one Master Shakespeare in the town ?" And such modesty, and such downcast eyes, and an appeal for one in misfortune : heaven save us, was it not well done? Modesty ! By my life, a rare modest gentleman ! He comes down to Stratford, armed with his London speech and his London manners, and he looks around. Which one, then ? which of all the maidens will his lordship choose for wife ? "Oh," saith he, "there is Judith Shakespeare ; she will do as well as another ; perchance better, for New Place is the fairest house in the town, and doubtless she will have a goodly marriage portion. So now how to secure her? how to charm her away from any clownish sweetheart she may chance to have ? Easily done, i' faith !—a country wench is sure to believe in magic ; 'tis but raising my own ghost out of the ground, and a summons to her, and I have her sure and safe, to win and to wear, for better or worse !" ' She looked at Prudence. 'Heaven's blessings on us all, good Prue, was there ever poor maiden played such a scurril trick ?'

'Then your eyes are opened, Judith,' said

Prudence, eagerly; 'you will have naught more to do with such a desperate villain!'

Again Judith looked at her, and laughed.

'I but told a story to frighten thee, dear heart,' said she. 'A desperate villain? Yes, truly; but 'tis I am the desperate villain to let such rascal suspicions possess me for an instant. Nay, good gossip, think of it!—is't possible that one would dare so much for so poor a prize? That the young gentleman hath some self-assurance, I know; and he can quickly make friends; but do you think, if any such dark design had been his, he would have entered my grandmother's cottage, and ate and drank there, and promised to renew his visit? Sweet judge in Israel, your decision on the other point, I pray you! What penance must I do for letting such cruel thoughts stray into my brain? How shall I purge them away? To whom must I confess? Nay, methinks I must go to the young gentleman himself and say: "Good sir, I have a friend and gossip that is named Prudence Shawe, who hath a strange belief in phantom-men and conspirators. I pray you pardon me that through her my brain is

somewhat distraught; and that I had half a mind to accuse you of a plot for stealing me away—me, who have generally this stout mastiff with me. I beseech you, sir, steal me not—nay, forgive me that I ever dreamed of your having any such purpose. 'Tis our rude country manners, good sir, that teach a maid to believe a man may not speak to her without intent to marry her. I pray you pardon me—my heart is kneeling to you, could you but see it—and give me such assurance that you meditated no such thing as will bring me back my scattered senses." Were not that well done? Shall that be my penance, good mouse?'

'Dear Judith, tell me true,' her friend said, almost piteously, 'do you suspect him of having played the wizard to cheat you and entrap you?'

'Good cousin,' said she, in her frankest manner, 'I confess: I did suspect—for an instant. I know not what put it into my head. But sure I am I have done him wrong—marry, 'twere no such deadly sin even had he been guilty of such a trick; but I believe it not—nay, he is too civil and gentle for a

jest of the kind. When I see him again, I must make him amends for my evil thinking: do not I owe him as much, sweetheart?'

This was all she could say at present, for Matthew gardener here made his appearance, and that was the signal for their withdrawing into the house. But that afternoon, as Judith bethought her that Master Leofric Hope would be coming to her grandmother's cottage with the manuscript he had promised to return, she became more and more anxious to see him again. Somehow she thought she could more effectually drive away this disquieting surmise if she could but look at him, and regard his manner, and hear him speak. As it turned out, however, it was not until somewhat late on in the evening that she found time to seek out little Willie Hart, and propose to him that he should walk with her as far as Shottery.

CHAPTER VII.

A DAUGHTER OF ENGLAND.

'SWEETHEART WILLIE,' she said—and her hand lay lightly on his shoulder as they were walking through the meadows in the quiet of this warm golden evening—'what mean you to be when you grow up?'

He thought for a second or two, and then he rather timidly regarded her.

'What would you have me to be, cousin Judith?' he said.

'Why, then,' said she, 'methinks I would have you be part student and part soldier, were it possible, like the gallant Sir Philip Sidney, that Queen Elizabeth said was the jewel of her reign. And yet you know, sweetheart, that we cannot all of us be of such great estate. There be those that live at the Court, and have wealth and lands, and expeditions given them to fit out, so that they

gain fame; that is not the lot of every one; and I know not whether it may be yours—though for brave men there is ever a chance. But this I know I would have you ready to do, whether you be in high position or in low, and that is to fight for England if needs be, and defend her, and cherish her. Why,' she said, 'what would you think, now, of one brought up by a gentle mother, one that owes his birth and training to this good mother, and because there is something amiss in the house, and because everything is not to his mind—he ups and says he must go away and forsake her? Call you that the thought of a loyal son and one that is grateful? I call it the thought of a peevish, froward, fractious child. Because, forsooth, this thing or the other is not to his worship's liking—or all the company not such as he would desire—or others of the family having different opinions, as surely, in God's name, they have a right to have—why, he must needs forsake the mother that bore him, and be off and away to other countries! Sweetheart Willie, that shall never be your mind, I charge you. No, you shall remain faithful to your mother

England, that is a dear mother and a good mother, and hath done well by her sons and daughters for many a hundred years; and you shall be proud of her, and ready to fight for her, ay, and to give your life for the love of her, if ever the need should be!'

He was a small lad, but he was sensitive and proud-spirited; and he loved dearly this cousin Judith who had made this appeal to him; so that for a second the blood seemed to forsake his face.

'I am too young as yet to do aught, cousin Judith,' said he, in rather a low voice —for his breath seemed to catch; 'but— but when I am become a man I know that there will be one that will sooner die than see any Spaniard or Frenchman seize the country.'

'Bravely said, sweetheart, by my life!' she exclaimed (and her approval was very sweet to his ears). 'That is the spirit that women's hearts love to hear of, I can tell thee.' And she stooped and kissed him in reward. 'Hold to that faith. Be not ashamed of your loyalty to your mother England! Ashamed?

Heaven's mercy, where is there such another country to be proud of? And where is there another mother that hath bred such a race of sons? Why, times without number have I heard my father say that neither Greece nor Rome nor Carthage nor any of them were such a race of men as these in this small island, nor had done such great things, nor earned so great a fame, in all parts of the world and beyond the seas. And mark you this, too: 'tis the men who are fiercest to fight with men that are gentlest to women; they make no slaves of their women; they make companions of them; and in honouring them they honour themselves, as I reckon. Why, now, could I but remember what my father hath written about England 'twould stir your heart, I know; that it would; for you are one of the true stuff, I'll be sworn; and you will grow up to do your duty by your gracious mother England—not to run away from her in peevish discontent!'

She cast about for some time: her memory, that she could not replenish by any book-reading, being a large and somewhat miscellaneous storehouse.

'Twas after this fashion,' said she, 'if I remember aright—

> "*This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle,*
> *This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,*
> *This fortress, built by nature for herself,*
> *Against infestion, and the hand of war:*
> *This happy breed of men, this little world;*
> *This precious stone set in the silver sea—*
> *Which serves it in the office of a wall,*
> *Or as a moat defensive to a house,*
> *Against the envy of less happier lands—*
> *This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this*
> *England!*"

Mark you that, sweetheart?—is't not a land worth fighting for? Ay, and she hath had sons that could fight for her; and she hath them yet, I dare be sworn, if the need were to arise. And this is what you shall say, cousin Willie, when you are a man and grown—

> "*Come the three corners of the world in arms,*
> *And we shall shock them: Naught shall make us rue*
> *If England to itself do rest but true!*"'

These quotations were but for the instruction of this small cousin of hers; and yet her own face was proud.

'Shall I be a soldier, then, cousin Judith?'

the boy said. 'I am willing enough. I would be what you would wish me to be; and if I went to the wars you would never have need to be ashamed of me.'

'That know I right well, sweetheart,' said she, and she patted him on the head. 'But 'tis not every one's duty to follow that calling. You must wait and judge for yourself. But whatever chances life may bring you, this must you ever remain—if you would have my love, sweetheart, and that I hope you shall have always—you must remain a good and loyal son to your mother England: one not easily discontented with small discomforts and sent forth in a peevish fit. Where is there a fairer country? Marry, I know of none. Look around—is't not a fair enough country?'

And fair indeed on this quiet evening was that wide stretch of Warwickshire—with its hedges and green meadows and low-lying wooded hills bathed in the warm sunset light. But it was the presence of Judith that made it all magical and mystical to him. Whatever she regarded with her clear-shining and wondrous eyes was beautiful enough for him

—while her hand lay on his shoulder or touched his hair. He was a willing pupil. He drank in those lessons in patriotism: what was it he would not do for his cousin Judith? What was it he would not believe if it were she who told him—in that strange voice of hers, that thrilled him, and was like music to him, whether she spoke to him in this proud, admonitory way, or was in a teasing mood, or was gentle and affectionate towards him? Yes, this Warwickshire landscape was fair enough under the calm sunset sky; but he knew not what made it all so mystical and wonderful, and made the far golden clouds seem as the very gateways to heaven.

'Or is there one with a prouder story?' she continued. 'Or a land of greater freedom? Why, look at me now. Here am I, a woman, easily frightened, helpless if there were danger, not able to fight any one. Why, you yourself, cousin Willie, if you were to draw a dagger on me, I declare to thee I would run and shriek and hide. Well, look at me as I stand here: all the might and majesty of England cannot harm me—I am

free to go or to stay—what needs one more? None durst put a hand on me; my mind is as free as my footsteps; I may go this way or that as I choose; and no one may command me to believe this, that, or the other. What more? And this security—think you it had not to be fought for?—think you it was not worth the fighting for? Or think you we should forget to give good thanks to the men that faced the Spaniards, and drove them by sea and shore, and kept our England to ourselves? Or think you we should forget our good Queen Bess, that I warrant me had as much spirit as they, and was as much a man as any of them?'

She laughed.

'Perchance you never heard, sweetheart, of the answer that she made to the Spanish ambassador?'

'No, Judith,' said he—but something in her manner told him that there had been no cowardice in that answer.

'Well,' she said, 'I will tell thee the story of what happened at Deptford. And now I bethink me, this must you do, cousin Willie, when you are grown to be a man; and

whether you be soldier or sailor, or merchant or student, 'tis most like that some day or other you will be in London; and then must you not fail to go straightway to Deptford to see the famous ship of Sir Francis Drake lying there. I tell thee, 'twas a goodly thought to place it there; that was like our brave Queen Bess; she would have the youth of the country regard with honour the ship that had been all round the world and chased the Spaniards from every sea. Nay, so bad is my memory that I cannot recall the name of the vessel—perchance 'twas the Judith—at least, I have heard that he had one of that name: but there it lies, to signal the glory of England and the routing of Spain.'

'The Judith,' said he, with wondering eyes. 'Did he name the ship after you, cousin?'

'Bless the lad, all that I am going to tell thee happened ere I was born!'

'No matter,' said he, stoutly, 'the first thing I will ask to see, if ever I get to London, is that very ship.'

'Well, then, the story,' she continued, shaping the thing in her mind (for being

entirely destitute of book-learning, historical incidents were apt to assume a dramatic form in her imagination, and also to lose literal accuracy of outline). 'You must know the Spaniards were sore vexed because of the doings of Francis Drake in all parts of the world, for he had plundered and harried them, and burnt their ships and their towns, and made the very name of England a terror to them. 'Tis no marvel if they wished to get hold of him; and they declared him to be no better than a pirate; and they would have the Queen—that is, our last Queen—deliver him over to them that they might do with him what they willed. Marry, 'twas a bold demand—to make of England! And the Queen—how does she take it, think you?—how is she moved to act in such a pass? Why, she goes down to Deptford, to this very ship that I told thee of—she, and all her nobles and ladies—for they would see the famous ship. Then they had dinner on board, as I have heard the story; and the Queen's Majesty asked many particulars of his voyages from Master Drake; and received from him certain jewels as a gift, and

was right proud to wear them. Then says she aloud to them all: "My lords, is this the man the Spaniards would have me give over to them?" Right well she knew he was the man; but that was her way; and she would call the attention of all of them. "Your Majesty," they said, "'tis no other." Then she swore a great oath that the Queen of England knew how to make answer to such a demand. "Come hither, Master Drake," says she, in a terrible voice. "Kneel!" Then he knelt on his knee before her. "My lord," says she to one of the noblemen standing by, "your sword!" And then, when she had the sword in her hand, she says, in a loud voice: "My lords, this is the man that Spain would have us give up to her; and this is the answer of England: Arise, Sir Francis!"—and with that she taps him on the shoulder—which is the way of making a knight, cousin Willie, and I pray you may be brave and valiant, and come to the same dignity, so that all of us here in Stratford shall say—"There, now, is one that knew how to serve faithfully his fair mother England!" But that was not all,

you must know, that happened with regard to Sir Francis Drake. For the Spanish ambassador was wroth with the Queen; ay, and went the length even of speaking with threats. "'Twill come to the cannon," says he. "What?" says she, turning upon him. "Your Majesty," says he, "I fear me this matter will come to the cannon." And guess you her answer?—nay, they say she spoke quite calmly, and regarded him from head to foot, and that if there were anger in her heart there was none in her voice. "Little man, little man," says she, "if I hear any more such words from thee, by God I will clap thee straight into a dungeon!"'

Judith laughed, in a proud kind of way.

'That was the answer that England gave,' said she, 'and that she is like to give again, if the Don or any other of them would seek to lord it over her!'

Three-fourths of these details were of her own invention; or rather—for it is scarcely fair to say that—they had unconsciously grown up in her mind from the small seed of the true story. But little Willie Hart had no distrust of any legend that his cousin

Judith might relate to him. Whatever Judith said was true—and also luminous in a strange kind of fashion: something beautiful and full of colour, to be thought over and pondered over. And now as they walked along towards the village—idly and lazily enough, for she had no other errand than to fetch back the manuscript that would be lying at the cottage—his eyes were wistful. His fancies were far away. What was it, then, that he was to do for England—that Judith should approve in the after years? And for how long should he be away—in the Spanish Main, perchance, of which he had heard many stories, or fighting in the lowlands of Holland, or whatever he was called to do—and what was there at the end? Well, the end that he foresaw and desired—the reward of all his toil—was nothing more nor less than this: that he should be sitting once again in a pew in Stratford church, on a quiet Sunday morning, with Judith beside him as of old, they listening to the singing together. He did not think of his being grown up, or that she would be other than she was now. His mind could form no other or fairer con-

summation than that—that would be for him the final good—to come back to Stratford town, to find Judith as she had ever been to him, gentle, and kind, and soft-handed, and ready with a smile from her beautiful and lustrous eyes.

'Yes, sweetheart Willie,' said she, as they were nearing the cottages, 'look at the quiet that reigns all around, and no priests of the Inquisition to come dragging my poor old grandmother from her knitting. What has she to do but look after the garden, and scold the maid, and fetch milk for the cat? And all this peace of the land that we enjoy we may have to fight for again; and then, if the King's Majesty calls, either for men or for money, you shall have no word but obedience. Heard you never of the Scotch knight, Sir Patrick Spens?—that the Scotch King would send away to Norroway at an evil time of the year? Did he grumble? Did he say his men were ill content to start at such a time? Nay, as I have heard, when he read the King's letter the tears welled in his eyes; but I'll be sworn that was for the companions he was taking with him to face the cruel sea.

> "*The King's daughter from Norroway,*
> *'Tis we must fetch her home,*"

he says; and then they up with their sails, and set out from the land that they never were to see more. What of that? They were brave men; they did what was demanded of them; though the black seas of the north were too strong for them in the end. 'Twas a sad tale, in good sooth—

> "*O lang, lang may the ladies sit,*
> *Wi' the fans into their hand,*
> *Before they see Sir Patrick Spens*
> *Come sailing to the strand!*
>
> "*And lang, lang may the maidens sit,*
> *Wi' their gold combs in their hair,*
> *All waiting for their ain dear loves,*
> *For them they'll see nae mair.*
>
> "*Half owre, half owre to Aberdour,*
> *'Tis fifty fathoms deep,*
> *And there lies good Sir Patrick Spens*
> *Wi' the Scots lords at his feet.*"

But what, then? I tell thee, sweetheart, any maiden that would be worth the winning would a hundred times liefer wail for a lover that had died bravely than welcome him back safe and sound as a coward. You shall be no coward, I warrant me, when you

are grown up to be a man; and above all—as I say—shall you be gentle and forgiving with your mother England, even if your own condition be not all you wish; and none the less for that shall you be willing to fight for her, should she be in trouble. Nay, I'll answer for thee, lad: I know thee well.'

'But, Judith,' said he, 'who are they you speak of, that are discontented, and would go away and leave the country?'

Well, it is probable she might have found some embarrassment in answering this question (if she had been pressed to name names) but that what she now beheld deprived her of the power of answering altogether. She had come over from the town with no other thought than to pay a brief visit to her grandmother and fetch back the portion of the play, and she had not the slightest expectation of encountering Master Leofric Hope. But there unmistakably he was—though he did not see her, for he was standing at the gate of her grandmother's cottage, and talking to the old dame, who was on the other side. There was no pretence of concealment. Here he was in the public path, idly chatting,

his hand resting on the gate. And as Judith had her cousin Willie with her, her first thought was to hurry away in any direction in order to escape an interview: but directly she saw that this was impossible, for her grandmother had descried her if Leofric Hope had not. The consequence was that, as she went forward to the unavoidable meeting, she was not only surprised and a trifle confused and anxious, but also somewhat and vaguely resentful; for she had been intending, before seeing him again, to frame in her mind certain tests which might remove or confirm one or two suspicions that had caused her disquietude. And now—and unfairly, as she thought—she found herself compelled to meet him without any such legitimate safeguard of preparation. She had no time to reflect that it was none of his fault. Why had not he left the play earlier, she asked herself? Why had not he departed at once? Why, with all his professions of secrecy, should he be standing in the open highway, carelessly talking? And what was she to say to little Willie Hart that would prevent his carrying back the tale to

the school and the town? When she went forward it was with considerable reluctance; and she had a dim hurt sense of having been imposed upon or somehow or another injured.

CHAPTER VIII.

VARYING MOODS.

But the strange thing was that the moment he turned and saw her—and the moment she met the quick look of friendliness and frank admiration that came into his face and his eloquent dark eyes—all her misgivings, surmises, suspicions, and half-meditated safeguards instantly vanished. She herself could not have explained it; she only knew that, face to face with him, she had no longer any doubt as to his honesty; and consequently that vague sense of injury vanished also. She had been taken unawares, but she did not mind. Everything, indeed, connected with this young man was of a startling, unusual character; and she was becoming familiar with that, and less resentful at being surprised.

'Ah, fair Mistress Judith,' said he, 'you

come opportunely: I would thank you from the heart for the gracious company I have enjoyed this afternoon, through your good will; in truth, I was loath to part with such sweet friends, and perchance detained them longer than I should.'

'I scarce understand you, sir,' said she, somewhat bewildered.

'Not the visions that haunt a certain magic island?' said he.

Her face lit up.

'Well, sir?' she asked, with a kind of pride; but at this point her grandmother interposed, and insisted—somewhat to Judith's surprise—that they should come in and sit down, if not in the house, at least in the garden. He seemed willing enough, for without a word he opened the gate to let Judith pass; and then she told him who her cousin was; and in this manner they went up to the little arbour by the hedge.

'Well, good sir, and how liked you the company?' said she cheerfully, when she had got within and sate down.

Her grandmother had ostensibly taken to her knitting; but she managed all the same

to keep a sharp eye on the young man; for she was curious, and wanted to know something further of the parcel that he had left with her. It was not merely hospitality or a freak of courtesy that had caused her to give him this sudden invitation. Her granddaughter Judith was a self-willed wench and mischievous: she would keep an eye on her too; she would learn more of this commerce between her and the young gentleman who had apparently dropped, as it were, from the skies. As for little Willie Hart, he remained outside, regarding the stranger with no great good will; but perhaps more with wonder than with anger, for he marvelled to hear Judith talk familiarly with this person, of whom he had never heard a word, as though she had known him for years.

'Tis not for one such as I,' said Master Leofric Hope, modestly—and with such a friendly regard towards Judith that she turned away her eyes and kept looking at this and that in the garden—'to speak of the beauties of the work; I can but tell you of the delight I have myself experienced. And yet how can I even do that? How

can I make you understand that—or my gratitude, either, sweet Mistress Judith—unless you know something of the solitude of the life I am compelled to lead? You would have yourself to live at Bassfield Farm, and watch the monotony of the days there, and be scarcely able to pass the time: then would you know the delight of being introduced to this fair region that your father hath invented, and being permitted to hear those creatures of his imagination speak to each other. Nay, but 'tis beautiful! I am no critical judge, but I swear 'twill charm the town!——'

'You think so, sir?' said she, eagerly, and for an instant she withdrew her eyes from the contemplation of the flowers. But immediately she altered her tone to one of calm indifference. 'My father hath many affairs to engage him, you must understand, good sir; perchance, now, this play is not such as he would have written had he leisure—and—and had he been commanded by the Court—and the like. Perchance 'tis too much of the human kind for such purposes?'

'I catch not your meaning, sweet lady,' said he.

'I was thinking,' said she, calmly, 'of the masques you told us of—at Theobalds and elsewhere — that Master Benjamin Jonson has written, and that they all seem to prize so highly: perchance these were of a finer stuff than my father hath time to think of, being occupied, as it were, with so many cares. 'Tis a rude life, having regard to horses, and lands, and malt, and the rest; and — and the Court ladies — they would rather have the gods and goddesses marching in procession, would they not? My father's writing is too much of the common kind, is it not, good sir?—'tis more for the prentices, one might say, and such as these?'

He glanced at her. He was not sure of her.

'The King, sweet lady,' said he, 'is himself learned, and would have the Court familiar with the ancient tongues; and for such pageants 'tis no wonder they employ Master Jonson, that is a great scholar. But surely you place not such things—that are but as toys—by the side of your father's

plays, that all marvel at and applaud, and that have driven away all others from our stage?'

'Say you so?' she answered, with the same indifferent demeanour. 'Nay, I thought that Master Scoloker—was that his worship's name?—deemed them to be of the vulgar sort. But perchance he was one of the learned ones. The King, they say, is often minded to speak in the Latin. What means he by that, good sir, think you? Hath he not yet had time to learn our English speech?'

'Wench, what would you?' her grandmother interposed, sharply. 'Nay, good sir, heed her not; her tongue be an unruly member, and maketh sport of her, as I think; but the wench meaneth no harm.'

'The King is proud of his learning, no doubt,' said he; and he would probably have gone on to deprecate any comparison between the Court masques and her father's plays but that she saw here her opportunity, and interrupted him.

'I know it,' she said, 'for the letter that the King sent to my father is writ in the Latin.'

'Nay, is it so?' said he.

She affected not to observe his surprise.

''Twas all the same to my father,' she continued, calmly, 'whether the letter was in one tongue or the other. He hath one book now—how is it called?—'tis a marvellous heap of old stories—the Jests?——'

'Not the *Gesta Romanorum?*' he said.

'The same, as I think. Well, he hath one copy that is in English, and of our own time, as I am told; but he hath also another and a very ancient copy, that is in the Latin tongue; and this it is—the Latin one, good sir—that my father is fondest of; and many a piece of merriment he will get out of it when Julius Shawe is in the house of an evening.'

'But the *Gesta* are not jests, good Mistress Judith,' said he, looking somewhat puzzled.

'I know not; I but hear them laughing,' said she, placidly. 'And as for the book itself, all I know of it is the outside; but that is right strange and ancient, and beautiful withal: the back of it white leather stamped with curious devices; and the sides of parchment printed in letters of red and black; and

the silver clasps of it with each a boar's head. I have heard say that that is the crest of the Scotch knight that gave the volume to my father when they were all at Aberdeen ; 'twas when they made Laurence Fletcher a burgess ; and the knight said to my father, "Good sir, the honour to your comrade is a general one, but I would have you take this book in particular, in the way of thanks and remembrance for your wit and pleasant company "—that, or something like that, said he ; and my father is right proud of the book, that is very ancient and precious ; and often he will read out of it—though it be in the Latin tongue. Oh, I assure you, sir,' she added, with a calm and proud air, 'tis quite the same thing to him. If the King choose to write to him in that tongue, well and good. Marry, now I think of it, I make no doubt that Julius Shawe would lend me the letter, did you care to see it.'

He looked up quickly and eagerly.

'Goes your goodness so far, sweet Mistress Judith ? Would you do me such a favour—and honour ?'

'Nay, young sir,' the grandmother said,

looking up from her knitting, 'tempt not the wench; she be too ready to do mad things out of her own mind. And you, grandchild, see you meddle not in your father's affairs.'

'Why, grandam,' Judith cried, ''tis the common property of Stratford town! Any one that goeth into Julius Shawe's house may see it. And why Julius Shawe's friends only? Beshrew me, there are others who have as good a title to that letter—little as my father valueth it!'

'Nay, I will forego the favour,' said he, at once, 'though I owe you none the less thanks, dear lady, for the intention of your kindness. In truth, I know not how to make you sensible of what I already owe you; for having made acquaintance with those fair creations, how can one but long to hear of what further befell them? My prayer would rather go in that direction—if I might make so bold.'

He regarded her now with a timid look. Well, she had not undertaken that he should see the whole of the play, nor had she even hinted to him of any such possibility; but it had been in her mind; and for the life of her

she could not see any harm in this brief loan of it. Harm? Had not even this small portion of it caused him to speak of her father's creations as if they were of a far more marvellous nature than the trumpery Court performances that had engrossed his talk when first she met him?

'There might be some difficulty, good sir,' said she, 'but methinks I could obtain for you the further portions, if my good grandmother here would receive them and hand them to you when occasion served.'

'What's that, wench?' her grandmother said, instantly.

''Tis but a book, good grandam, that I would lend Master Hope to lighten the dulness of his life at the farm withal: you cannot have any objection, grandmother?'

''Tis a new trade to find thee in, wench,' said her grandmother. 'I'd a thought thou wert more like to have secret commerce in laces and silks.'

'I am no peddler, good madam,' said he, with a smile, 'else could I find no pleasanter way of passing the time than in showing to you and your fair granddaughter my store of

braveries. Nay, this that I would beg of you is but to keep the book until I have the chance to call for it; and that is a kindness you have already shown in taking charge of the little package I left for Mistress Judith here.'

'Well, well, well,' said the old dame, 'if 'tis anything belonging to her father, see you bring it back, and let not the wench get into trouble.'

'I think you may trust me so far, good madam,' said he, with such simplicity of courtesy and sincerity that even the old grandmother was satisfied.

In truth she had been watching the two of them with some sharpness during these few minutes to see if she could detect anything in their manner that might awaken suspicion. There was nothing. No doubt the young gentleman regarded Judith with an undisguised wish to be friendly with her, and say pretty things; but was that to be wondered at? 'Twas not all the lads in Stratford that would be so modest in showing their admiration for a winsome lass. And this book-lending commerce was but natural

in the circumstances. She would have been well content to hear that his affairs permitted him to leave the neighbourhood—and that would happen in good time; meanwhile there could be no great harm in being civil to so well-behaved a young gentleman. So now, as she had satisfied herself that the leaving of the package meant nothing dark or dangerous, she rose and hobbled away in search of the little maid, to see that some ale was brought out for the refreshment of her visitor.

'Sweetheart Willie,' Judith called, 'what have you there? Come hither!'

Her small cousin had got hold of the cat; and was vainly endeavouring to teach it to jump over his clasped hands. He took it up in his arms, and brought it with him to the arbour — though he did not look in the direction of the strange gentleman.

'We shall be setting forth for home directly,' said she. 'Wilt thou not sit down and rest thee?'

''Tis no such distance, cousin,' said he.

He seemed unwilling to come in; he kept

stroking the cat, with his head averted. So she went out to him and put her arm round his neck.

'This, sir,' said she, 'is my most constant companion, next to Prudence Shawe; I know not to what part of all this neighbourhood we have not wandered together. And such eyes he hath for the birds' nests; when I can see naught but a cloud of leaves he will say, why, 'tis so and so, or so and so; and up the tree like a squirrel, and down again with one of the eggs, or perchance a small naked birdling to show me. But we always put them back, sweetheart, do we not?—we leave no bereft families, nor sorrowing mother-bird to find an empty nest. We do as we would be done by; and 'tis no harm to them that we should look at the pretty blue eggs, or take out one of the small chicks with its downy feathers and its gaping bill. And for the fishing, too—there be none cleverer at setting a line, as I hear, or more patient in watching: but I like not that pastime, good cousin Willie, for or soon or late you are certain to fall through the bushes into the river, as happened to Dickie Page last week, and there may not

be some one there to haul you out, as they hauled out him.'

'And how fares he at the school?' said the young gentleman in the arbour.

'Oh, excellent well, as I am told,' said she, 'although I be no judge of lessons myself. Marry, I hear good news of his behaviour; and if there be a bloody nose now and again —why, a boy that's attacked must hold his own and give as good as he gets—'twere a marvel else—and 'tis no use making furious over it, for who knows how the quarrel began? Nay, I will give my cousin a character for being as gentle as any and as reasonable; and if he fought with Master Crutchley's boy, and hit him full sore, I fear, between the eyes —well, having heard something of the matter, I make no doubt it served young Crutchley right, and that elder people should have a care in condemning when they cannot know the beginning of the quarrel. Well, now I bethink me, sweetheart, tell me how it began, for that I never heard. How began the quarrel?'

'Nay, 'twas nothing,' he said, shamefacedly.

'Nothing? Nay, that will I not believe. I should not wonder now if it were about some little wench? What? Nay, I'll swear it now! 'Twas about the little wench that has come to live at the Vicarage—what's her name?—Minnie, or Winnie——?'

''Twas not, then, Judith,' said he. 'If you must know, I will tell you; I had liefer say naught about it. But 'twas not the first time he had said so—before all of them—that my uncle was no better than an idle player, that ought to be put in the stocks and whipt.'

'Why, now,' said she, 'to think that the poor lad's nose should be set a-bleeding for nothing more than that!'

'It had been said more than once, cousin Judith; 'twas time it should end,' said he, simply.

At this moment Master Leofric Hope called to him.

'Come hither, my lad,' said he, 'I would hear how you get on at school.'

The small lad turned and looked at him, but did not budge. His demeanour was entirely changed. With Judith he was invariably gentle, submissive, abashed: now,

as he looked at the stranger, he seemed to resent the summons.

'Come hither, my lad.'

'Thank you, no, sir,' he said, 'I would as lief be here.'

'Sweetheart, be these your manners?' Judith said.

But the young gentleman only laughed good-naturedly.

'Didst thou find any such speeches in the *Sententiæ Pueriles?*' said he. 'They were not there when I was at school.'

'When go we back to Stratford, Judith?' said the boy.

'Presently, presently,' said she (with some vague impression that she could not well leave until her grandmother's guest showed signs of going also). 'See here is my grandam coming with various things for us; and I warrant me you shall find some gingerbread amongst them.'

The old dame and the little maid now came along, bringing with them ale and jugs and spiced bread and what not, which were forthwith put on the small table; and though Judith did not care to partake of these—and

was rather wishful to set out homeward again —still, in common courtesy, she was compelled to enter the arbour and sit down. Moreover, Master Hope seemed in no hurry to go. It was a pleasant evening, the heat of the day being over; the skies were clear, fair, and lambent, with the declining golden light; why should one hasten away from this quiet bower, in the sweet serenity and silence, with the perfume of roses all around, and scarce a breath of air to stir the leaves? He but played with this slight refection; nevertheless, it was a kind of excuse for the starting of fresh talk; and his talk was interesting and animated. Then he had discovered a sure and easy way of pleasing Judith, and instantly gaining her attention. When he spoke of the doings in London, her father was no longer left out of these: nay, on the contrary, he became a central figure; and she learned more now of the Globe and Blackfriars theatres than ever she had heard in her life before. Nor did she fail to lead him on with questions. Which of her father's friends were most constant attendants at the theatre? Doubtless they had chairs set for

them on the stage? Was there any one that her father singled out for especial favour? When they went to the tavern in the evening, what place had her father at the board? Did any of the young lords go with them? How late sate they? Did her father outshine them all with his wit and merriment, or did he sit quiet and amused—for sometimes it was the one and sometimes the other with him here in Stratford? Did they in London know that he had such a goodly house, and rich lands, and horses? And was there good cooking at the tavern—Portugal dishes, and the like? Or perchance (she asked, with an inquiring look from the beautiful, clear eyes) it was rather poor? And the napery now: it was not always of the cleanest? And instead of neat-handed maids, rude serving-men, tapsters, drawers, and so forth? And the ale—she could be sworn 'twas no better than the Warwickshire ale; no, nor was the claret likely to be better than that brought into the country for the gentlefolk by such noted vintners as Quiney. Her father's lodging—that he said was well enough, as he said everything was well enough, for she had never known

him utter a word of discontent with anything that happened to him—perchance 'twas none of the cleanliest?—for she had heard that the London housewives were mostly slovens, and would close you doors and windows against the air, so that a countryman going to that town was like to be sickened. And her father—did he ever speak of his family when he was in London? Did they know he had belongings? Nay, she was certain he must have talked to his friends and familiars of little Bess Hall—for how could he help that?

'You forget, sweet Mistress Judith,' said he, in his pleasant way, 'that I have not the honour of your father's friendship, nor of his acquaintance even, and what I have told you is all of hearsay, save with regard to the theatre, where I have seen him often. And that is the general consent: that this one may have more learning, and that one more sharpness of retort, but that in these encounters he hath a grace and a brilliancy far out-vying them all, and, moreover, with such a gentleness as earns him the general good-will. Such is the report of him; I would it had

been in my power to speak from my own experience.'

'But that time will come, good sir,' said she, 'and soon, I trust.'

'In the meanwhile,' said he, 'bethink you what a favour it is that I should be permitted to come into communion with those fair creations of his fancy; and I would remind you once more of your promise, sweet Mistress Judith; and would beseech your good grandmother to take charge of anything you may leave for me. Nay, 'twill be for no longer than an hour or two that I would detain it; but that brief time I would have free from distractions, so that the mind may dwell on the picture. Do I make too bold? Or does your friendship go so far?'

'In truth, sir,' she answered, readily, 'if I can, I will bring you the rest of the play—but perchance in portions, as the occasion serves; 'twere no great harm should you carry away with you some memory of the Duke and his fair daughter on the island.'

'The time will pass slowly until I hear more of them,' said he.

'And meanwhile, good grandmother,' said

she, 'if you will tell me where I may find the little package, methinks I must be going.'

At this he rose.

'I beseech your pardon if I have detained you, Mistress Judith,' said he, with much courtesy.

'Nay, sir, I am indebted to you for welcome news,' she answered, 'and I would I had longer opportunity of hearing. And what said you—that he outshone them all?—that it was the general consent?'

'Can you doubt it?' he said, gallantly.

'Nay, sir, we of his own household—and his friends in Stratford—we know and see what my father is: so well esteemed, in truth, as Julius Shawe saith, that there is not a man in Warwickshire would cheat him in the selling of a horse—which they are not slow to do, as I hear, with others. But I knew not he had won so wide and general a report in London, where they might know him not so well as we.'

'Let me assure you of that, dear lady,' he said, 'and also that I will not forget to bring or send you the printed tribute to his good qualities that I spoke of, when that I may

with safety go to London. 'Tis but a trifle, but it may interest his family; marry, I wonder he hath not himself spoken of it to you.'

'He speak of it?' said she, regarding him with some surprise, as if he ought to have known better. 'We scarce know aught of what happeneth to him in London. When he comes home to Warwickshire it would seem as if he had forgotten London and all its affairs, and left them behind for good.'

'Left them behind for good, say you, wench?' the old dame grumbled, mostly to herself, as she preceded them down the path. 'I would your father had so much sense. What hath he to gain more among the players and dicers and tavern brawlers and that idle crew? Let him bide at home, among respectable folk. Hath he not enough of gear gathered round him, eh? It be high time he slipped loose from those mummers that play to please the cut-purses and their trulls in London. Hath he not enough of gear?'

'What say you, grandmother? You would have my father come away from London and live always in Warwickshire? Well, now,

that is nearer than you think, or my guesses are wrong.'

But her grandmother had gone into the cottage; and presently she returned with the little package. Then there was a general leave-taking at the gate; and Leofric Hope —after many expressions of his thanks and good-will—set out on his own way; Judith and her cousin taking the path through the meadows.

For some time they walked in silence; then, as soon as the stranger was out of ear-shot, the lad looked up and said—

'Who is that, Judith?'

'Why,' said she, lightly, 'I scarcely know myself; but that he is in misfortune and hiding, and that he knoweth certain of my father's friends, and that he seems pleased to have a few words with one or other of us to cheer his solitude. You would not begrudge so much, sweetheart? Nay, there is more than that I would have you do: his safety depends on there being no talk about him in the town; and I know you can keep a secret, cousin Willie; so you must not say a word to any one—whether at school, or at home, or at

New Place—of your having seen him. You will do as much for my sake, sweetheart?'

'Yes; but why for your sake, cousin?' said the boy, looking up. 'Why should you concern yourself?'

'Nay, call it for anybody's sake, then,' said she. 'But I would not have him betrayed by any one that I had aught to do with—and least of all by you, sweetheart, that I expect to show nothing but fair and manly parts. Nay, I trust you. You will not blab.'

And then as they walked on, it occurred to her that this young gentleman's secret—if he wished it kept—was becoming somewhat widely extended in his neighbourhood. In her own small circle how many already knew of his presence?—her grandmother, Prudence Shawe, herself, Tom Quiney, and now this little Willie Hart. And she could not but remember that not much more than half an hour ago she had seen him at the garden-gate, carelessly chatting, and apparently not heeding in the least what passers-by might observe him. But that was always the way: when she left him, when she was with her own thoughts, curious surmises would cross her

mind; whereas, when she met him, these were at once discarded. And so she took to arguing with herself as to why she should be so given to do this young man injustice in his absence, when, every time she encountered him face to face, she was more than ever convinced of his honesty. Fascination? Well, she liked to hear of London town and the goings on there; and this evening she had been particularly interested in hearing about the Globe Theatre, and the spectators, and the tavern to which her father and his friends repaired for their supper; but surely that would not blind her if she had any reason to think that the young man was other than he represented? And then, again, this evening he had been markedly deferential. There was nothing in his manner of that somewhat too open gallantry he had displayed in the morning when he made his speech about the English roses. Had she not wronged him, then, in imagining even for a moment that he had played a trick upon her in order to make her acquaintance? It is true, she had forgotten to make special remark of his eyes, as to whether they were like those of the wizard;

for, indeed, the suspicion had gone clean out of her mind. But now she tried to recall them; and she could not fairly say to herself that there was a resemblance. Nay, the wizard was a solemn person, who seemed to rebuke her light-heartedness; he spoke gravely and slow; whereas this young man, as any one could see, had a touch of merriment in his eye, that was ready to declare itself on further acquaintance, only that his deference kept him subdued; while his talk was light and animated and rapid. No, she would absolve him from this suspicion; and soon, indeed, as she guessed, he would absolve himself, by removing from the neighbourhood; and probably she would hear no more of him, unless, perchance, he should remember to send her that piece of print concerning her father.

And then her thoughts went far afield. She had heard much of London that evening; and London, in her mind, was chiefly associated with her father's plays, or such as she knew of them; and these again were represented to her by a succession of figures, whose words she thought of, whose faces she saw,

when, as now, her fancies were distant. And she was more silent than usual as they went on their way across the meadows ; and scarce addressed a word to her companion; insomuch that at last he looked up into her face, and said :

'Judith, why are you so sad this evening?'

'Sad, sweetheart? Surely no,' she answered, and she put her hand on his head. 'What makes thee think so?'

'Did Dame Hathaway speak harshly to you?' said he. 'Methought I heard her say something. Another time I will bid her hold her peace.'

'Nay, nay, not so,' said she; and as they were now come to a stile, she paused there, and drew the boy towards her.

Not that she was tired; but the evening was so quiet and still; and the whole world seemed falling into a gentle repose. There was not a sound near them; the earth was hushed as it sank to sleep; far away they could hear the voices of children going home with their parents, or the distant barking of a dog. It was late; and yet the skies seemed full of light; and all the objects around them

were strangely distinct and vivid. Behind them the north-western heavens were of a pale luminous gold; overhead and in front of them the great vault was of a beautiful lilac-gray, deepening to blue in the sombre east; and into this lambent twilight the great black elms rose in heavy masses. The wide meadows still caught some of the dying radiance; and there was a touch of it on the westward-looking gables of one or two cottages: and then through this softened glow there came a small keen ray of lemon-yellow—a light in one of the far-off windows, that burned there like a star. So hushed this night was, and so calm and beautiful, that a kind of wistfulness fell over her mind—scarcely sadness, as the boy had imagined—but a dull longing for sympathy, and some vague wonder as to what her life might be in the years to come.

'Why, sweetheart,' said she, absently, and her hand lay affectionately on his shoulder, 'as we came along here this evening we were speaking of all that was to happen to you in after-life; and do you never think you would like to have the picture unrolled now,

and see for yourself, and have assurance? Does not the mystery of it make you impatient, or restless, or sad—so that you would fain have the years go by quick, and get to the end? Nay, I trow not; the day and the hour are sufficient for thee; and 'tis better so. Keep as thou art, sweetheart; and pay no heed to what may hereafter happen to thee.'

'What is't that troubles you, Judith?' said he, with an instinctive sympathy, for there was more in her voice than in her words.

'Why, I know not myself,' said she, slowly, and with her eyes fixed vacantly on the darkening landscape. 'Nothing, as I reckon. 'Tis but beating one's wings against the invisible to seek to know even to-morrow. And in the further years some will have gone away from Stratford, and some to far countries, and some will be married, and some grown old; but to all the end will be the same; and I dare say now that, hundreds of years hence, other people will be coming to Stratford, and they will go into the churchyard there, and walk about and look at the names—that is, of you and me and all the

rest of us—and they will say, "Poor things, they vexed themselves about very small matters while they were alive, but they are all at peace at last."'

'But what is it that troubles you, Judith?' said he—for this was an unusual mood with her, who generally was so thoughtless, and merry, and high-hearted.

'Why, nothing, sweetheart, nothing!' said she, seeming to rouse herself. ''Tis the quiet of the night that is so strange; and the darkness coming. Or will there be moonlight? In truth, there must be; and getting near to the full, as I reckon. A night for Jessica! Heard you ever of her, sweetheart?'

'No, Judith.'

'Well, she was a fair maiden, that lived long ago, somewhere in Italy, as I think. And she ran away with her lover, and was married to him, and was very happy; and all that is now known of her is connected with music, and moonlight, and an evening such as this. Is not that a fair life to lead after death: to be in all men's thoughts always as a happy bride, on such a still night as this is

now? And would you know how her lover spoke to her?—this is what he says:

"*How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!*
Here will we sit, and let the sounds of music
Creep in our ears: soft stillness and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony.
Sit, Jessica. Look, how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patins of bright gold:
There's not the smallest orb which thou beholdst
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins:
Such harmony is in immortal souls;
But, whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.
Come, ho! and wake Diana with a hymn;
With sweetest touches pierce your mistress' ear
And draw her home with music."

Is not that a gentle speech? And so shall you speak to your bride, sweetheart, in the years to come, when you have wooed her and won her. And then you will tell her that if she loves you not—ay, and if she loves you not dearly and well—then she is not like one that you knew long ago, and that was your cousin, and her name Judith Shakespeare. Come, sweetheart,' said she, and she rose from the stile, and took his hand in hers. 'Shall I draw thee home? But not with

sweet music, for I have not Susan's voice. I would I had, for thy sake.'

'You have the prettiest voice in the whole world, cousin Judith,' said he.

And so they walked on and in to the town, in silence mostly. The world had grown more solemn now: here and there in the lilac-gray deeps overhead a small silver point began to appear. And sure he was that whatever might happen to him in the years to come, no sweetheart or any other would ever crush out from his affection or from his memory this sweet cousin of his; for him she would always be the one woman, strange and mystical and kind; there never would be any touch like the touch of her hand, so gentle was it as it rested on his hair; and there never would be anything more wonderful and gracious to look forward to than the old and familiar sitting in the church pew by Judith's side, with the breathless fascination of knowing that she was so near, and the thrill of hearing her join (rather timidly, for she was not proud of her voice) in the singing of the choir.

CHAPTER IX.

A DISCOVERY.

'THAT be so as I tell ye, zur,' said Matthew gardener, as he slowly sharpened a long knife on the hone that he held in his hand, 'it all cometh of the pampering of queasy stomachs nowadays that cannot hold honest food. There be no such folk now as there wur in former days, when men wur hardy, and long-lived, and healthy; and why, zur?—why, but that they wur content wi' plain dishes of pulse or herbs, and for the most worshipful no more than a dish of broth and a piece of good wholesome beef withal. But nowadays, Lord, Lord!—dish after dish, with each his several sauce; and this from Portugal and that from France, so that gluttony shall have its swing, and never a penny be kept for the poor. Nay, I tell ye, zur, rich and poor alike wur stronger and healthier when there wur

no such waste in the land; when a man would wear his frieze coat and hosen of the colour of the sheep that bore them; and have his shirt of honest hemp or flax; and could sleep well with his head on a block of wood and a sheepskin thrown o'er it. But nowadays must he have his shirt of fine lawn and needle-work; ay, and his soft pillow to lie on, so that his lily-white body shall come to no scratching; nor will he drink any longer small drink, no, nor water, but heavy ales and rich wines; and all goeth to the belly and naught to his poorer neighbour. And what cometh of this but tender stomachs, and riot, and waste?—and lucky if Bocardo be not at the end of it all?'

As it chanced on this fine morning, Judith's father had strolled along to look at some trained apple-trees at the farther end of the garden, and finding goodman Matthew there, and having a mind for idleness, had sate down on a bench to hear what news of the condition of the land Matthew might have to lay before him.

'Nay, but, good Matthew,' said he, 'if these luxuries work such mischief, 'tis the

better surely that the poor have none of them. They, at least, cannot have their stomachs ruined with sauces and condiments.'

'Lord bless ye, zur,' said the ancient, with a wise smile, ''tis not in one way but in all ways that the mischief is done; for the poorest, seeing such waste and gluttony everywhere abroad, have no continence of their means, but will spend their last penny on any foolishness. Lord, Lord, they be such poor simple creatures!—they that have scarce a rag to their backs will crowd at the mops and fairs, and spend their money—on what? Why, you must ha' witnessed it, zur—the poor fools!—emptying their pouches to see a woman walking on a rope, or a tumbler joining his hands to his heels, or a hen with two heads! The poor simple creatures!—and yet I warrant me they be none so poor but that the rascal doctor can make his money out o' them: 'tis a foine way o' making a fortune that—going vagrom about the country with his draughts and pills—not honest medicines that a body might make out o' wholesome herbs, but nauseous stinking stuff that robs a man of his breath in the very swallowing of it.

And the almanac makers, too—marry, that, now, be another thriving trade!—the searching of stars, and the prophesying of dry or wet weather! Weather? what know they of the weather, the town-bred rogues, that lie and cheat to get at the poor countryfolks' money? God-a-mercy, a whip to their shoulders would teach them more o' the weather than ever they are like to get out of the stars! And yet the poor fools o' countrymen—that scarce know a B from a battledore—will sit o' nights puzzling their brains o'er the signs o' the heavens; and no matter what any man with eyes can see for himself—ay, and fifty times surer, as I take it—they will prophesy you a dry month or a wet month, because the almanac saith so; and they will swear to you that Taurus—that is a lion—and the virgin scales have come together, therefore there must be a blight on the pear-trees! Heard you ever the like, zur—that a man in Lunnon, knowing as much about husbandry and farm-work as a cat knows about quoit-throwing, is to tell me the weather down here in Warwickshire? God help us, they be poor weak creatures that think so; I'd liefer

look at the cover of a penny ballad, if I wanted to know when there was to be frost o' nights.'

At this juncture the old man grinned as if some secret joke were tickling his fancy.

'Why, zur,' said he, looking up from the hone, 'would you believe this, zur—they be such fools that a rogue will sell them a barren cow for a milch-cow if he but put a strange calf to her? 'Tis done, zur, 'tis done, I assure ye.'

'In truth, a scurvy trick!' Judith's father said. He was idly drawing figures on the ground with a bit of stick he had got hold of. Perhaps he was not listening attentively; but at all events he encouraged Matthew to talk. 'But surely with years comes wisdom. The most foolish are not caught twice with such a trick.'

'What of that, zur?' answered Matthew. 'There be plenty of other fools in the land to make the trade of roguery thrive. 'Tis true that a man may learn by his own experience; but what if he hath a son that be growing up a bigger fool than himself? And

that's where 'tis nowadays, zur; there be no waiting and prudence, but every saucy boy must match on to his maid and marry her ere they have a roof to put over their heads. 'Tis a fine beginning, surely! No waiting, no prudence—as the rich are wasteful and careless, so are the poor heedless of the morrow; and the boy and the wench, they must have their cottage at the lane end, run up of elder poles, and forthwith begin the begetting of beggars to swarm over the land. A rare beginning!—body o' me, do they think they can live on nettles and grass, like Nebuchadnezzar?'

And so the old man continued to rail, and grumble, and bemoan, sometimes with a saturnine grin of satisfaction at his own wit coming over his face; and Judith's father did not seek to controvert; he listened, and drew figures on the ground, and merely put in a word now and again. It was a pleasant morning—fresh, and clear, and sunny; and this town of Stratford was a quiet place at that hour, with the children all at school. Sometimes Judith's father laughed, but he did not argue; and goodman Matthew, hav-

ing it all his own way, was more than ever convinced, not only that he was the one wise man among a generation of fools, but also that he was the only representative and upholder of the Spartan virtues that had characterised his forefathers. It is true that on more than one occasion he had been found somewhat overcome with ale; but this, when he had recovered from his temporary confusion, he declared was entirely due to the rascal brewers of those degenerate days—and especially of Warwickshire—who put all manner of abominations into their huff-cap, so that an honest Worcestershire stomach might easily be caught napping, and take no shame.

And meanwhile what had been happening in another part of the garden? As it chanced, Judith had been sent by her mother to carry to the summer-house a cup of wine and some thin cates; and, in doing so, she of course saw that both her father and goodman Matthew were at the farther end of the garden, and apparently settled there for the time being. The opportunity was too good to be lost. She swiftly went back to the

house, secured the portion of the play that was secreted there, and as quickly coming out again, exchanged it for an equal number of new sheets. It was all the work of a couple of minutes; and in another second she was in her own room, ready to put the precious prize into her little cupboard of boxes. And yet she could not forbear turning over the sheets and examining them curiously; and she was saying to herself: 'You cruel writing, to have such secrets, and refuse to give them up! If it were pictures now, I could make out something, with a guess; but all these little marks, so much alike, what can one make of them? —all alike—with here and there a curling, as if my father had been amusing himself—and all so plain and even, too, with never a blot; marry, I marvel he should make the other copy, unless with intent to alter as he writes. And those words with the big letters at the beginning, these be the people's names—Ferdinand, and sweet Miranda, and the Duke, and the ill beast that would harm them all. Why, in Heaven's mercy, was I so fractious? I might even now be learning all the story—here by myself—the only one in the land—I

might all by myself know the story that will set the London folk agog in the coming winter. And what a prize were this, now, for Master Ben Jonson! Could one but go to him and say, "Good sir, here be something better than your masques and mummeries, your Greeks and clouds and long speeches; put your name to it, good sir—nay, my father hath abundant store of such matter, and we in Warwickshire are no niggards—put your name to it, good sir, and you will get the Court ladies to say you have risen a step on the ladder, else have they but a strange judgment?" What would the goodman do? Beshrew me, Prudence never told me the name of the play! but let us call it *The Magic Island. The Magic Island, by Master Benjamin Jonson.* What would the wits say?'

But here she heard some noise on the stair; so she quickly hid away the treasure in the little drawer, and locked it up safe there until she should have the chance of asking Prudence to read it to her.

That did not happen until nearly nightfall; for Prudence had been away all day

helping to put the house straight of a poor woman that was ill and in bed. Moreover, she had been sewing a good deal at the children's clothes, and her eyes looked tired—or perhaps it was the wan light that yet lingered in the sky that gave her that expression, the candles not yet being lit. Judith regarded her, and took her hands tenderly, and made her sit down.

'Sweet mouse,' said she, 'you are wearing yourself out in the service of others; and if you take such little heed of yourself you will yourself fall ill. And now must I demand of you further labour? Or will it be a refreshment for you after the fatigue of the day? See, I have brought them all with me—the sprite Ariel, and the sweet Prince, and Miranda; but in good sooth I will gladly wait for another time if you are tired——'

'Nay, not so, Judith,' she answered. 'There is nothing I could like better—but for one thing.'

'What, then?'

'Mean you to show this also to the young gentleman that is at Bidford?'

'And wherefore not, good Prue? He

hath seen so much of the story 'twere a pity he should not have the rest. And what a small kindness—the loan but for an hour or two—and I need not even see him, for I have but to leave it at my grandmother's cottage. And if you heard what he says of it, and how grateful he is; marry, it all lies in this, sweet Prue, that you have not seen him, else would you be willing enough to do him so small a favour.'

By this time Prudence had lit the candles; and presently they made their way upstairs to her own room.

'And surely,' said Judith, as her gentle gossip was arranging the manuscript, 'the story will all end well and merrily for the sweet maiden, seeing how powerful her father is? Will he not compel all things to her happiness—he that can raise storms and that has messengers to fly round the world for him?'

'And yet he spoke but harshly to the young man when last we saw them,' Prudence said. 'Why, what's this?'

She had run her eye down the first page and now she began reading—

'"Enter FERDINAND, bearing a log.

Ferdinand. *There be some sports are painful, and their labour*
Delight in them sets off. This my mean task
Would be as heavy to me as odious, but
The mistress which I serve quickens what's dead
And makes my labours pleasures. Oh, she is
Ten times more gentle than her father's crabbed,
And he's composed of harshness. I must remove
Some thousands of these logs and pile them up
Upon a sore injunction: My sweet mistress
Weeps when she sees me work, and says, such baseness
Had never like executor."'

Judith's face had gradually fallen.

'Why, 'tis cruel,' said she; 'and 'tis cruel of my father to put such pain on the sweet Prince, that is so gentle and so unfortunate withal.'

But Prudence continued the reading—

'"Enter MIRANDA.

Miranda. *Alas, now, pray you*
Work not so hard: I would the lightning had
Burnt up those logs that you are enjoined to pile!
Pray, set it down and rest you; when this burns
'Twill weep for having wearied you. My father
Is hard at study; pray now, rest yourself;
He's safe for these three hours.
Ferdinand. *O most dear mistress,*
The sun will set before I shall discharge
What I must strive to do.

Miranda. *If you'll sit down,*
I'll bear your logs the while: pray, give me that—
I'll carry it to the pile."'

At this point Judith's eyes grew proud and grateful (as though Miranda had done some brave thing), but she did not speak, and the gentle reader went on.

'Nay, is she not fair and modest?' Judith exclaimed, when Miranda had timidly avowed her admiration for this new friend; and, as the reading proceeded, she began to think of how Master Leofric Hope would regard such a maiden. Would he not judge her to be right gentle, womanly withal, and frank in her confiding? And he—supposing that he were the young Prince—what would he think of such an one? Was it too submissive that she should offer to carry the logs? Ought she to so openly confess that she would fain have him to be her companion? And then at last, when the two lovers had declared their love, Judith clapped her hands and laughed—in delight and triumph.

'Why, sure her father will relent!' she cried.

'But Judith, Judith, stay,' Prudence said,

quickly, and with scarce less gladness. 'Tis so set down; for this is what her father says—

> "*So glad of this as they I cannot be,*
> *Who are surprised withal; but my rejoicing*
> *At nothing can be more.*"

Nay, I take it he will soon explain to us why he was so harsh with the young Prince—perchance to try his constancy?'

Well, after that the reading went on as far as the sheets that Judith had brought; but ever her mind was returning to the scene between the two lovers, and speculating as to how Leofric Hope would look upon it. She had no resentment against Ben Jonson now; her heart was full of assurance and triumph, and was therefore generous. Her only vexation was that the night must intervene before there could be a chance of the young London gentleman calling at the cottage; and she looked forward to the possibility of seeing him some time or other with the determination to be more demure than ever. She would not expect him to praise this play. Perchance 'twas good enough for simple Warwickshire folk, but the London wits

might consider it of the vulgar kind? And she laughed to herself at thinking how awkward his protests would be if she ventured to hint anything in that direction.

Prudence put the sheets carefully together again.

'Judith, Judith,' she said, with a quiet smile, 'you lead me far astray. I ought to find such things wicked and horrible to the ear; but perchance 'tis because I know your father—and see him from day to day—that I find them innocent enough. They seem to rest the mind when one is sorrowful.'

'Beware of them, good Prue; they are the devil himself come in the guise of an angel to snatch thee away. Nay, but, sweetheart, why should you be sorrowful?'

'There is Martha Grimes,' said she, simply, 'and her children, nigh to starving; and I cannot ask my brother for more——'

Judith's purse was out in an instant.

'Why,' said she, 'my father did not use half of what I gave him for the knife he bought at Warwick—marry, I reckon he paid for it mostly himself; but what there is here you shall have, and welcome.'

And she emptied the contents on to the table, and pushed them over to her friend.

'You do not grudge it, Judith?' said Prudence. 'Nay, I will not ask thee that. Nor can I refuse it either, for the children are in sore want. But why should you not give it to them yourself, Judith?'

'Why?' said Judith, regarding the gentle face with kindly eyes. 'Shall I tell thee why, sweetheart? 'Tis but this: that if I were in need, and help to be given me, I would value it thrice as much if it came from your hand. There is a way of doing such things, and you have it: that is all.'

'I hear Julius is come in,' Prudence said, as she took up the two candles. 'Will you go in and speak with him?'

There was some strange hesitation in her manner, and she did not go to the door. She glanced at Judith somewhat timidly. Then she set the candles down again.

'Judith,' said she, 'your pity is quick, and you are generous and kind; I would you could find it in your heart to extend your kindness.'

'How now, good cousin?' Judith said, in amazement. 'What's this?'

Prudence glanced at her again, somewhat uneasily, and obviously in great embarrassment.

'You will not take it ill, dear Judith?'

'By my life, I will not! Not from you, dear heart, whatever it be. But what is the dreadful secret?'

'Tom Quiney has spoken to me,' she said, diffidently.

Judith eagerly caught both her hands.

'And you? What said you? 'Tis all settled, then!' she exclaimed, almost breathlessly.

'It is as I imagined, Judith,' said Prudence, calmly—and she withdrew her hands, with a touch of maidenly pride, perhaps, from what she could not but imagine to be a kind of felicitation. 'He hath no fault to find with the country. If he goes away to those lands beyond seas 'tis merely because you will say no word to hold him back.'

'I?' said Judith, impatiently; and then she checked herself. 'But you, sweetheart, what said he to you?'

Prudence's cheeks flushed red.

'He would have me intercede for him,' she said, timidly.

'Intercede? With whom?'

'Why, you know, Judith; with whom but yourself? Nay, but be patient—have some kindness. The young man opened his heart to me, and I know he is in trouble. 'Twas last night as we were coming home from the lecture; and he would have me wait till he left a message at his door, so that thus we fell behind; and then he told me why it was that Stratford had grown distasteful to him, and not to be borne, and why he was going away. How could I help saying that that would grieve you?—sure I am you cannot but be sorry to think of the young man banishing himself from his own people. And he said that I was your nearest friend; and would I speak for him? And I answered that I was all unused to such matters, but that if any pleading of mine would influence you I would right gladly do him that service; and so I would, dear Judith—for how can you bear to think of the youth going away with these godless men, and perchance never

to return to his own land, when a word from you would restrain him?'

Judith took both her hands again, and looked with a kindly smile into the timid pleading eyes.

'And 'tis you, sweet mouse, that come to me with such a prayer. Was there ever so kind a heart? But that is you ever and always — never a thought for yourself, everything for others. And so he had the cruelty to ask you—you—to bring this message?'

'Judith,' said the other, with the colour coming into her face again, 'you force me to speak against my will. Nay, how can I hide from myself, dear friend, that you have plans and wishes—perchance suspicions—with regard to me? And if what I guess be true—if that is your meaning—indeed 'tis all built on a wrong foundation: believe me, Judith, it is so. I would have you assured of it, sweetheart. You know that I like not speaking of such matters; 'tis not seemly and becoming to a maiden; and fain would I have my mind occupied with far other things; but, Judith, this time I must speak plain; and I would

have you put away from you all such intentions and surmises—dear heart, you do me wrong!'

'In good sooth am I all mistaken?' Judith said, glancing keenly at her.

'Do you doubt my word, Judith?' said she.

'And yet,' her friend said, as if to herself, and musingly, 'there were several occasions: there was the fortune-teller at Hampton Lucy that coupled you, and Quiney seemed right merry withal; and then again, when he would have us play kiss-in-the-ring on the evening after Mary Sadler's marriage, and I forbade it chiefly for your sake, then methought you seemed none over-pleased with my interference——'

But here she happened to look at Prudence, and she could not fail to see that the whole subject was infinitely distressing to her. There was a proud, hurt expression on the gentle face, and a red spot burning in each cheek. So Judith took hold of her and kissed her.

'Once and for ever, dearest heart,' said she, 'I banish all such thoughts. And I will

make no more plans for thee, nor suspect thee, but let thee go in thine own way, in the paths of charity and goodness. But I mean not to give up thy friendship, sweet Prue; if I cannot walk in the same path at least I may stretch a hand over to thee; and if I but keep so near so true a saint, marry, I shall not go so far wrong.'

She took up one of the candles.

'Shall we go down and see Julius?' said she.

'But Tom Quiney, Judith—what shall I say?' Prudence asked, anxiously.

'Why, say nothing, sweetheart,' was the immediate answer. ''Twas a shame to burden you with such a task. When he chooses he can at any moment have speech of me, if his worship be not too proud—or too suspicious. In Stratford we can all of us speak the English tongue, I hope.'

'But, Judith,' said the other, slowly and wistfully, 'twenty years is a long space for one to be away from his native land.'

'Marry is it, sweet mouse,' Judith answered, as she opened the door and proceeded to go down the narrow wooden steps. ''Tis

a long space indeed; and at the end of it many a thing that seemeth of great import and consequence now will be no better than an old tale, idle and half-forgotten.'

CHAPTER X.

PORTENTS.

It was somewhat hard on little Bess Hall that her aunt Judith was determined she should grow up as fearless as she herself was, and had, indeed, charged herself with this branch of her niece's education. The child, it is true, was not more timid than others of her age, and could face with fair equanimity beggars, schoolboys, cows, geese, and other dangerous creatures; while as for ghosts, goblins, and similar nocturnal terrors, Judith had settled all that side of the question by informing the maids of both families, in the plainest language, that any one of them found even mentioning such things to this niece of hers would be instantaneously and without ceremony shot forth from the house. But beyond and above all this Judith expected too much; and would flout

and scold when Bess Hall declined to perform the impossible; and would threaten to go away and get a small boy out of the school to become her playmate in future. At this moment, for example, she was standing at the foot of the staircase in Dr. Hall's house. She had come round to carry off her niece for the day; and she had dressed her up like a small queen; and now she would have her descend the wide and handsome staircase in noble state and unaided. Bess Hall, who had no ambition to play the part of a queen, but had, on the other hand, a wholesome and instinctive fear of breaking her neck, now stood on the landing, helpless amid all her finery, and looking down at her aunt in a beseeching sort of way.

'I shall tumbie down, Aunt Judith; I know I shall,' said she; and budge she would not.

'Tumble down, little stupid! Why, what should make you tumble down? Are you going for ever to be a baby? Any baby can crawl downstairs by holding on to the balusters!'

'I know I shall tumbie down, Aunt Judith —and then I shall cry.'

But even this threat was of no avail.

'Come along, little goose; 'tis easy enough when you try it. Do you think I have dressed you up as a grown woman, to see you crawl like a baby? A fine woman—you! Come along, I say!'

But this lesson, happily for the half-frightened pupil, was abruptly brought to an end. Judith was standing with her face to the staircase and her back to the central hall and the outer door, so that she could not see any one entering; and indeed the first intimation she had of the approach of a stranger was a voice behind her.

'Be gentle with the child, Judith.'

And then she knew that she was caught. For some little time back she had very cleverly managed to evade the good parson, or, at least, to secure the safety of company when she saw him approach. But this time she was as helpless as little Bess herself. Dr. Hall was away from home; Judith's sister was ill of a cold and in bed; there was no one in the house, besides the servants, but herself. The only thing she could do was to go up to the landing, swing her niece on to

her shoulder, and say to Master Walter that they were going round to New Place, for that Susan was ill in bed and unable to look after the child.

'I will walk with you as far,' said he, calmly, and indeed as if it were rather an act of condescension on his part.

She set out with no good will. She expected that he would argue; and she had an uncomfortable suspicion that he would get the best of it. And if she had once or twice rather wildly thought that in order to get rid of all perplexities, and in order to please all the people around her, she would in the end allow Master Walter Blaise to win her over into becoming his wife, still she felt that the time was not yet. She would have the choosing of it for herself. And why should she be driven into a corner prematurely? Why be made to confess that her brain could not save her? She wanted peace. She wanted to play with Bess Hall, or to walk through the meadows with Willie Hart, teaching him what to think of England; she did not want to be confronted with clear, cold eyes, and arguments like steel, and the

awful prospect of having to labour in the vineyard through the long, long, gray and distant years. She grew to think it was scarcely fair of her father to hand her over. He, at least, might have been on her side. But he seemed as willing as any that she should go away among the saints, and forsake for ever (as it seemed to her) the beautiful, free, and clear-coloured life that she had been well content to live.

And then, all of a sudden, it flashed upon her mind that she was a player's daughter; and a kind of flame went to her face.

'I pray you, good Master Blaise,' said she, with a lofty and gracious courtesy, 'bethink you, ere you give us your company through the town.'

'What mean you, Judith?' said he, in some amazement.

'Do you forget, then, that I am the daughter of a player?—and this his granddaughter?' said she.

'In truth, I know not what you mean, Judith,' he exclaimed.

'Why,' said she, 'may not the good people who are the saints of the earth

wonder to see you consort with such as we? —or rather, with one such as I, who am impenitent, and take no shame that my father is a player—nay, God's my witness, I am wicked enough to be proud of it, and I care not who knows it, and they that hope to have me change my thoughts on that matter will have no lack of waiting.'

Well, it was a fair challenge, and he answered it frankly, and with such a reasonableness and charity of speech that, despite herself, she could not but admit that she was pleased, and also, perhaps, just a little bit grateful. He would not set up to be any man's judge, he said; nor was he a Pharisee; the Master that he served was no respecter of persons—He had welcomed all when He was upon the earth—and it behoved his followers to beware of pride and the setting up of distinctions; if there was any house in the town that earned the respect of all it was New Place; he could only speak of her father as he found him, here, in his own family, among his own friends—and what that was, all men knew; and so forth. He spoke well, and modestly; and Judith was so

pleased to hear what he said of her father that she forgot to ask whether all this was quite consistent with his usual denunciations of plays and players, his dire prophecy as to the fate of those who were not of the Saints, and his sharp dividing and shutting off of these. He did not persecute her at all. There was no argument. What he was mostly anxious about was that she should not tire herself with carrying Bess Hall on her shoulder.

'Nay, good sir,' said she, quite pleasantly, ''tis a trick my father taught me; and the child is but a feather-weight.'

He looked at her—so handsome, and buxom, and full of life and courage; her eyes lustrous; the rose-leaf tint of health in her cheeks; and always at the corner of her mouth what could only be called a disposition to smile, as if the world suited her fairly well, and that she was ready at any moment to laugh her thanks.

'There be many, Judith,' said he, 'who might envy you your health and good spirits.'

'When I lose them 'twill be time enough to lament them,' said she, complacently.

'The hour that is passing seems all-in-all to you; and who can wonder at it?' he continued. 'Pray Heaven your carelessness of the morrow have reason in it. But all are not so minded. There be strange tidings in the land.'

'Indeed, sir; and to what end?' said she.

'I know not whether these rumours have reached your house,' he said, 'but never, at any time I have read of, have men's minds been so disturbed—with a restlessness and apprehension of something being about to happen. And what marvel? The strange things that have been seen and heard of throughout the world of late—meteors, and earthquakes, and visions of armies fighting in the heavens. Even so was Arma-gedon to be foreshadowed. Nay, I will be honest with you, Judith, and say that it is not clear to my own mind that the great day of the Lord is at hand; but many think so; and one man's reading of the Book of Revelation is but a small matter to set against so wide a belief. Heard you not of the vision that came to the young girl at Chipping Camden last Monday?'

'Indeed no, good sir.'

'I marvel that Prudence has not heard of it, for all men are speaking of it. 'Twas in this way, as I hear. The maiden is one of rare piety and grace, given to fasting and nightly vigils and searching of the heart. 'Twas on the night of Sunday last—or perchance towards Monday morning—that she was awakened out of her sleep by finding her room full of light; and looking out of the window she beheld in the darkness a figure of resplendent radiance—shining like the sun, as she said, only clear white, and shedding rays around; and the figure approached the window, and regarded her; and she dropped on her knees in wonder and fear, and bowed her head and worshipped. And as she did so she heard a voice say to her: "Watch and pray: Behold, I come quickly." And she durst not raise her head, as she says, being overcome with fear and joy; but the light slowly faded from the room; and when at last she rose she saw something afar off in the sky, that was now grown dark again. And ever since she has been trembling with the excitement of it, and will take no food;

but from time to time she cries in a loud voice: "Lord Jesus, come quickly; Lord Jesus, come quickly!" Many have gone to see her, as I hear, and from all parts of the country; but she heeds them not; she is intent with her prayers; and her eyes, the people say, look as if they had been dazzled with a great light, and are dazed and strange. Nay, 'tis but one of many things that are murmured abroad at present; for there have been signs in the heavens seen in sundry places, and visions; and men's minds grow anxious.'

'And what think you yourself, good sir?—you are one that should know.'

'I?' said he. 'Nay, I am far too humble a worker to take upon myself the saying ay or no at such a time; I can but watch and pray and wait. But is it not strange to think that we here, at this moment, walking along this street in Stratford, might within some measurable space—say a year or half a dozen years or so—that we might be walking by the pure river of water that John saw, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb? Do you not remember how the early

Christians, with such a possibility before their eyes, drew nearer to each other, as it were, and rejoiced together, parting with all their possessions, and living in common, so that the poorest were even as the rich? 'Twas no terror that overtook them, but a happiness; and they drew themselves apart from the world, and lived in their own community, praying with each other, and aiding each other. "All that believed," the Bible tells us, "were in one place, and had all things common. And they sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every one had need. And they continued daily in the Temple, and, breaking bread at home, did eat their meat together with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and had favour with all the people; and the Lord added to the Church from day to day, such as should be saved." Such a state of spiritual brotherhood and exaltation may come among us once more; methinks I see the symptoms of its approach even now; blessed are they who will be in that communion with a pure soul and a humble mind, for the Lord will be with them as their guide,

though the waters should arise and overflow, or fire consume the earth.'

'Yes, but, good sir,' said she, 'when the early Christians you speak of thought the world was near to an end they were mistaken? And these, now, of our day——?'

'Whatever is prophesied must come to pass,' said he, 'or soon or late; though it is possible for our poor human judgment to err as to the time. But surely we ought to be prepared: and what preparation, think you, is sufficient for so great and awful a change? Joy there may be in the trivial things of this world—in the vanities of the hour, that pass away, and are forgotten; but what are these things to those whose heart is set on the new Jerusalem — the shining city? The voice that John heard proclaimed no lie; 'twas the voice of the Lord of heaven and earth; a promise to them that wait and watch for His coming. "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, neither crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the first things are passed. . . . And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and

of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. And they shall see His face; and His Name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light, and they shall reign for evermore."'

She sighed.

'"Tis too wonderful a thing for poor sinful creatures to expect,' she said.

But by this time they were at the house, and he could not say anything further to her; indeed, when he proposed that she should come into the sitting-room, and that he would read to her a description of the glories of the New Jerusalem out of the Book of Revelation, she excused herself by saying that she must carry Bess Hall to see her father. So he went in and sate down, waiting for Judith's mother to be sent for; while aunt and niece went out and through the back-yard to the garden.

'Bess,' said Judith, on the way, 'heardst thou aught of a white figure?'

'No, Judith,' said the child, who had been engaged all the way in examining the pretti-

nesses of her aunt's velvet cap, and ruff, and what not.

'That is well,' said she.

When she got into the garden she could see that goodman Matthew eyed their approach with little favour — for Bess Hall, when her grandfather had charge of her, was allowed to tear flowers, and walk over beds, or do anything she chose; but Judith did not mind that much. On the other hand, she would not go deliberately and disturb her father. She would give him his choice—to come forth or not as he pleased. And so, quite noiselessly, and at a little distance off, she passed the summer-house. There was no sign. Accordingly, she went on idly to the farther end of the garden, and would doubtless have remained there (rather than return within-doors) amusing the child somehow, but that the next minute her father appeared.

'Come hither, Bess! Come hither, wench!' he called.

Nay, he came to meet them; and as he lifted the child down from Judith's shoulder, something—perhaps it was the touch of the

sunlight on the soft brown of her short curls —seemed to attract his notice.

'Why, wench,' said he to Judith, 'methinks your hair grows prettier every day. And yet you keep it over short—yes, 'tis over short—would you have them think you a boy?'

'I would I were a man,' said she, glancing at him rather timidly.

'How then? What now?'

'For then,' said she, 'might I help you in your work, so please you, sir.'

He laughed and said:

'My work? What know you of that, wench?'

The blood rushed to her face.

'Nay, sir, I but meant the work of the fields—in going about with the bailiff and the like. The maids say you were abroad at five this morning.'

'Well, is't not the pleasantest time of the day in this hot weather?' he said—and he seemed amused by her interference.

'But why should you give yourself so many cares, good father?' she made bold to say (for she had been meditating the saying

of it for many a day back). 'You that have great fame, and land, and wealth. We would fain see you rest a little more, father;—and 'tis all the harder to us that we can give you no help, being but women-folk.'

There was something in the tone of her voice—or perhaps in her eyes—that conveyed more than her words. He put his hand on her head.

'You are a good lass,' said he. 'And listen. You can do something for me that is of far more value to me than any help in any kind of work: nay, I tell thee 'tis of greater value to me than all of my work; and 'tis this: keep you a merry heart, wench—let me see your face right merry and cheerful as you go about—that is what you can do for me; I would have you ever as you are now, as bright and glad as a summer day.'

''Tis an easy task, sir, so long as you are content to be pleased with me,' she managed to answer; and then little Bess Hall—who could not understand why she should have been so long left unnoticed — began to scramble up his knees, and was at last transferred to his arms.

Judith's heart was beating somewhat quickly, with a kind of pride and gladness that was very near bringing tears to her eyes; but, of course, that was out of the question, seeing that he had enjoined her to be cheerful. And so she forced herself to say, with an odd kind of smile:

'I pray you, sir, may I remain with you for a space—if Bess and I trouble you not?'

'Surely,' said he, looking at her; 'but what is it, then?'

'Why,' said she, pulling herself together, 'good Master Blaise is within-doors, and his last belief is enough to frighten a poor maiden—let alone this small child. He says the world is nigh unto its end.'

'Nay, I have heard of some such talk being abroad,' said he, 'among the country folk. But why should that frighten thee? Even were it true, we can make it nor better nor worse.'

'Only this, father,' said she, and she looked at him with the large, clear-shining gray eyes no longer near to tears, but rather suggesting some dark mystery of humour, 'that if the end

of the world be so nigh at hand 'twould be an idle thing for the good parson to think of taking him a wife.'

'I ask for no secrets, wench,' her father said—as he placed little Bess Hall on the branch of an apple-tree.

'Nay, sir, he but said that as many were of opinion that something dreadful was about to happen we should all of us draw nearer together. That is well, and to be understanded; but if the world be about to end for all of us, surely 'twere a strange thing that any of us should think of taking husband or wife?'

'I meddle not,' her father said. 'Go thine own ways. I have heard thou hast led more than one honest lad in Stratford a madcap dance. Take heed; take heed—as thy grandmother saith—lest thou outwear their patience.'

And then something—she could scarce tell what—came into her head: some wild wish that he would remain always there at Stratford: would she not right willingly discard all further thoughts of lovers or sweethearts if only he would speak to her some-

times as he had just been speaking; and approve of her hair; and perchance let her become somewhat more of a companion to him? But she durst not venture to say so much. She only said, very modestly and timidly—

'I am content to be as I am, sir, if you are content that I should bide with you.'

'Content?' said he, with a laugh that had no unkindness in it. 'Content that thou shouldst bide with us? Keep that pretty face of thine merry and glad, good lass—and have no fear.'

CHAPTER XI.

A LETTER.

When she should get back from Master Leofric Hope the last portion of the yet unnamed play, there remained (as she considered) but one thing more—to show him the letter written by the King to her father, so that, when the skies should clear over the young gentleman's head, and he be permitted to return among his friends and acquaintances, he might have something else occasionally to talk of than Ben Jonson and his masques and his favour at Court. Nor had she any difficulty in procuring the letter; for Prudence was distinctly of opinion that by right it belonged to Judith, who had coveted it from the beginning. However, Judith only now wanted the loan of it for a day or two, until, in her wanderings, she might encounter Master Hope.

That opportunity soon arrived; for whether it was that the young gentleman kept a sharp look-out for her, or whether she was able to make a shrewd guess as to his probable whereabout at certain hours of the day, she had scarcely ever failed to meet him when she went over to Shottery for the successive instalments of the play that he had left for her there. On this occasion she had found the last of these awaiting her at the cottage; and when she had put it into her velvet satchel, and bade good-bye to her grandmother, she set out for home with a pretty clear fore-knowledge that sooner or later the young gentleman would appear. Was it not his duty?—to say what he thought of all this romance that he had been allowed to see; and to thank her, and say farewell? For she had a vague impression that she had done as much as could reasonably be expected of her in the way of cheering the solitude of one in misfortune; and she had gathered, moreover, that he was likely soon to leave the neighbourhood. But she would not have him go without seeing the King's letter.

Well, when he stepped forth from behind some trees she was not surprised; and even the Don had grown accustomed to these sudden appearances.

'Give ye good-day, sweet lady,' said he.

'And to you, sir,' she said. 'I thank you for your care in leaving me these pages; I would not have had any harm come to them, even though my father will in time throw them away.'

'And my thanks to you, sweet Mistress Judith,' said he,—'how can I express them?'—and therewith he entered upon such an eulogy of the story he had just been reading as she was not likely to hear from any Stratford-born acquaintance. Indeed he spoke well, and with obvious sincerity; and although she had intended to receive these praises with indifference (as though the play were but a trifle that her father had thrown off easily amid the pressure of other labours) she did not quite succeed. There was a kind of triumph in her eyes; her face was glad and proud; when he quoted a bit of one of Ariel's songs she laughed lightly.

'He is a clever musician, that merry imp, is he not?' said she.

'I would I had such a magic-working spirit to serve me,' said he, looking at her. 'One could shape one's own course then. "Under the blossom that hangs on the bough" would be my motto; there would be no going back to London or any other town. And what think you: might he not find out for me some sweet Miranda?—not that I am worthy of such a prize, or could do aught to deserve her, except in my duty and humble service to her. The Miranda, I think, could be found,' he said, glancing timidly at her, 'nay, I swear I know myself where to find just such a beautiful and gentle maiden; but where is the Ariel that would charm her heart and incline her to pity and kindness?'

'Here, sir,' said she, quickly, 'is the letter I said I would bring you, that the King wrote to my father.'

He did not look at the blue velvet satchel; he looked at her—perhaps to see whether he had gone too far. But she did not show any sign of confusion or resentment; at all events she pretended not to be conscious;

and, for one thing, her eyes were lowered, for the satchel seemed for a second or so difficult to open. Then she brought forth the letter.

'Perchance you can tell me the English of it, good sir?' said she. 'Tis some time since Master Blaise read it for us, and I would hear it again.'

'Nay, I fear my Latin will scarce go so far,' said he, 'tis but little practice in it I have had since my school-days; but I will try to make out the sense of it.'

She carefully opened the large folded sheet of paper and handed it to him. This was what he found before him:

'JACOBUS D. G. Rex Anglorum et Scotorum poetæ nostro fideli et bene dilecto GULIELMO SHAKESPEARE, S. P. D.

'Cum nuper apud Londinium commorati comœdiam tuam nobis inductam spectássemus, de manu viri probi Eugenii Collins fabulæ libro accepto, operam dedimus ut eam diligenter perlegeremus. Subtilissima illa quidem, multisque ingenii luminibus et artis, multis etiam animi oblectamentis, excogitata, nimis tamen accommodata ad cacchinationem movendam vulgi imperiti, politioris humanitatis expertis. Quod vero ad opera tua futura attinet, amicissime te admonemus ut multa commentatione et meditatione exemplaria verses antistitum illorum artis comœdicæ, Menandri scilicet

Atheniensis et Plauti et Terentii Romani, qui minus vulgi plausum captabant quam vitiis tanquam flagellis castigandis studebant. Qui optimi erant arte et summa honestate et utilitate, qualem te etiam esse volumus; virtutum artium et exercitationum doctores, atque illustrium illorum a Deo ad populum regendum præpositorum adminicula. Quibus fac ne te minorem præstes; neque tibi nec familiaribus tuis unquam deerimus quin, quum fiat occasio, munere regali fungamur. Te interea Deus opt. max. feliciter sospitet.

'Datum ex regia nostra apud Greenwich X. Kal. Jun.'

He began his translation easily—

'"To our trusty and well-beloved poet, William Shakespeare: Health and Greeting."' But then he began to stammer. '"When formerly—when recently—tarrying in London—thy comedy—thy comedy—" nay, fair Mistress Judith, I beseech your pardon; I am grown more rusty than I thought, and would not destroy your patience. Perchance, now, you would extend your favour once more, and let me have the letter home with me, so that I might spell it out in school-boy fashion.'

She hesitated, but only for a second.

'Nay, good sir, I dare not. These sheets of the play were thrown aside, and so far of little account; but this—if aught were to

come amiss to this letter, how should I regard myself? If my father value it but slightly there be others who think more of it; and—and they have entrusted it to me; I would not have it go out of my own keeping, so please you, and pardon me.'

It was clear that she did not like to refuse this favour to so courteous and grateful a young gentleman. However, her face instantly brightened.

'But I am in no hurry, good sir,' said she. 'Why should you not sit you on the stile there, and take time to master the letter, while I gather some wild flowers for my father? In truth, I am in no hurry; and I would fain have you know what the King wrote.'

'I would I were a school-boy again for five minutes,' said he, with a laugh; but he went obediently to the stile, and sate down, and proceeded to pore over the contents of the letter.

And then she wandered off by herself (so as to leave him quite undisturbed) and began to gather here and there a wild rose from the hedge, or a piece of meadow-sweet from the

bank beneath, or a bit of yarrow from among the grass. It was a still, clear, quiet day, with some rainy clouds in the sky; and beyond these, near to the horizon, broad silver shafts of sunlight striking down on the woods and the distant hills. It looked as if a kind of mid-day sleep had fallen over the earth; there was scarce a sound; the birds were silent; and there was not even enough wind to make a stirring through the wide fields of wheat or in the elms. The nosegay grew apace, though she went about her work idly—kneeling here, and stretching a hand there; and always she kept away from him, and would not even look in his direction; for she was determined that he should have ample leisure to make out the sense of the letter, of which she had but a vague recollection, only that she knew it was complimentary.

Even when he rose and came towards her she pretended not to notice. She would show him she was in no hurry. She was plucking the heads of red clover, and sucking them to get at the honey; or she was adding a buttercup or two to her nose-

gay; or she was carelessly humming to herself—

'O stay and hear; your true love's coming
That can sing both high and low.'

'Well, now, Mistress Judith,' said he, with an air of apology, 'methinks I have got at the meaning of it, however imperfectly; and your father might well be proud of such a commendation from so high a source—the King, as every one knows, being a learned man, and skilled in the arts. And I have not heard that he has written to any other of the poets of our day——'

'No, sir?' said she, quickly. 'Not to Master Jonson?'

'Not that I am aware of, sweet lady,' said he, 'though he hath sometimes messages to send, as you may suppose, by one coming from the Court. And I marvel not that your father should put store by this letter, that speaks well of his work——'

'Your pardon, good sir, but 'tis not so,' said Judith, calmly. 'Doubtless if the King commend my father's writing, that showeth that His Majesty is skilled and learned, as you say; and my father was no doubt pleased

enough—as who would not be?—by such a mark of honour; but as for setting great value on it, I assure you he did not: nay, he gave it to Julius Shawe. And will you read it, good sir?—I remember me there was something in it about the ancients.'

''Tis but a rough guess that I can make,' said he, regarding the paper. 'But it seems that the King had received at the hands of one Eugene Collins the book of a comedy of your father's that had been presented before His Majesty when he was recently in London. And very diligently, he says, he has read through the same; and finds it right subtly conceived, with many beauties and delights, and such ornaments as are to be approved by an ingenious mind. It is true, His Majesty hints, that there may be parts of the play more calculated than might be to move the laughter of the vulgar; but you would not have a critic have nothing but praise?—and the King's praise is high indeed. And then he goes on to say that, as regards your father's future work, he would in the most friendly manner admonish him to study the great masters of the comic

art, that is, Menander the Athenian, and the Romans Plautus and Terentius, who—who—what says the King?—less studied to capture the applause of the vulgar than to lash the vices of the day as with whips. And these he highly commends as being of great service to the State; and would have your father be the like: teachers of virtue, and also props and aids to those whom God hath placed to rule over the people. He would have your father be among these public benefactors; and then he adds that, when occasion serves, he will not fail to extend his royal favour to your father and his associates; and so commends him to the protection of God. Nay, 'tis a right friendly letter; there is none in the land that would not be proud of it; 'tis not every day nor with every one that King James would take such trouble and play the part of tutor.'

He handed her the letter; and she proceeded to fold it up carefully again, and put it in her satchel. She said nothing; but she hoped that these phrases of commendation would remain fixed in his mind when that he was returned to London.

And then there was a moment of embarrassment—or, at least, of constraint. He had never been so near the town with her before (for his praise of her father's comedy, as they walked together, had taken some time), and there before them were the orchards and mud walls, and farther off the spire of the church among the trees. She did not like to bid him go; and he seemed loath to say farewell; he probably having some dim notion that, now he had seen the end of the play and also this letter, there might be some difficulty in finding an excuse for another meeting.

'When do you return to London?' said she, for the sake of saying something. 'Or may you return? I hope, good sir, your prospects are showing brighter; it must be hard for one of your years to pass the time in idleness.'

'The time that I have spent in these parts,' said he, 'has been far more pleasant and joyful to me than I could have imagined —you may easily guess why, dear Mistress Judith. And now, when there is some prospect of my being able to go, I like it not; so

many sweet hours have been passed here, the very fields and meadows around have acquired a charm——'

'Nay, but, good sir,' said she, a little breathlessly, 'at your time of life, you would not waste the days in idleness——'

'In truth it has been a gracious idleness!' he exclaimed.

'At your time of life,' she repeated, quickly, 'why, to be shut up in a farm——'

'The Prince Ferdinand,' said he, 'though I would not compare myself with him, found the time pass pleasantly and sweetly enough, as I reckon, though he was shut up in a cave. But then there was the fair Miranda to be his companion. There is no Ariel to work such a charm for me, else do you think I could ever bring myself to leave so enchanting a neighbourhood?'

'Good sir,' said she (in some anxiety to get away), 'I may not ask the reason of your being in hiding, though I wish you well; and would fain hear there was no further occasion for it. And I trust there may be none when next you come to Warwickshire; and that those of our household who have a better

right to speak for it than I will have the chance of entertaining you. And now I would bid you farewell.'

'No, dear Judith!' he exclaimed, with a kind of entreaty in his voice. 'Not altogether? Why, look at the day!—would you have me say farewell to you on such a day of gloom and cloud? Surely you will let me take away a brighter picture of you, and of Warwickshire, and of our brief meetings in these quiet spots—if go I must. In truth I know not what may happen to me; I would speak plainer, but I am no free agent; I can but beg of you to judge me charitably, if ever you hear aught of me——'

And here he stopped abruptly; and paused, considering, and obviously irresolute and perplexed.

'Why,' said he, at length, and almost to himself, 'why should I go away at all? I will carry logs—if needs be—or anything. Why should I go?'

She knew instantly what he meant; and knew, also, that it was high time for her to escape from so perilous a situation.

'I pray you pardon me, good sir; but I must go. Come, Don——'

'But one more meeting, sweet Mistress Judith,' he pleaded, 'on a fairer day than this —you will grant as much?'

'I may not promise,' said she, 'but indeed I leave with you my good wishes—and so, farewell!'

'God shield you, dearest lady,' said he, bowing low; 'you leave with me also a memory of your kindness that will remain in my heart.'

Well, there was no doubt that she felt very much relieved when she had left him and was nearing the town; and yet she had a kind of pity for him too, as she thought of his going away by himself to that lonely farm—one so gentle, and so grateful for company, being shut up there on this gloomy day. Whereas she was going back to a cheerful house; Prudence was coming round to spend the afternoon with them and help to mark the new napery; and then in the evening the whole of them, her father included, were going to sup at Dr. Hall's, who had purchased a dishful of ancient coins in one of his pere-

grinations, and would have them come and examine them. Perhaps, after all, that reference to Miranda was not meant to apply to her? It was but natural he should speak of Miranda, having just finished the play? And carrying logs: he could not mean carrying logs for her father?—that would be a foolish jest. No, no; he would remain at the farm and spend the time as best he might; and then, when this cloud blew over, he would return to London, and carry with him (as she hoped) some discreet rumour of the new work of her father's that he had praised so highly, and perchance some mention of the compliments paid by the King; and if, in course of time, the young gentleman should make his way back to Stratford again, and come to see them at New Place, and if his pleasant manner and courtesy proved to be quite irresistible, so that she had to allow the wizard's prophecy to come true in spite of herself, why, then, it was the hand of fate, and none of her doing, and she would have to accept her destiny with as good a grace as might be.

As she was going into the town she met

Tom Quiney. He was on the other side of the roadway, and, after one swift glance at her, he lowered his eyes, and would have passed on without speaking. And then it suddenly occurred to her that she would put her pride in her pocket. She knew quite well that her maidenly dignity had been wounded by his suspicions, and that she ought to let him go his own way, if he chose. But on the other hand (and this she did not know), there was in her nature an odd element of what might be called boyish generosity—of frankness, and common sense, and good comradeship. And these two had been very staunch comrades in former days, each being in a curious manner the protector of the other; for while she many a time came to his aid—being a trifle older than he, and always ready with her quick feminine wit and ingenuity when they were both of them likely to get into trouble—he, on his side, was her shield and bold champion by reason of his superior stature, and his strength, and his terrible courage in face of bulls or barking dogs and the like. For the moment she only thought of him as her old companion; and she was a

good-natured kind of creature—and frank and boyish in her ways; and so she stepped across the road—though there was some mud about.

'Why can't we be friends?' said she.

'You have enough of other friends,' said he.

It was a rebuff; but still—she would keep down her girlish pride.

'I hope you are not going away from the country,' said she.

He did not meet her look; his eyes were fixed on the ground.

'What is there to keep me in it?' was his answer.

'Why, what is there to keep any of us in it?' she said. 'Heaven's mercy, if we were all to run away when we found something or another not quite to our liking what a fine thing that would be! Nay, I hope there is no truth in it,' she continued, looking at him, and not without some memories of their escapades together, when they were boy and girl. ''Twould grieve many—indeed it would. I pray you think better of it. If for no other, for my sake; we used to be better friends.'

There were two figures now approaching.

'Oh, here come Widow Clemms and her daughter,' she said; 'a rare couple—'twill be meat and drink to them to carry back a story. No matter. Now, fare you well—but pray think better of it; there be many that would grieve if you went away.'

He stole a look at her as she passed on: perhaps there was a trifle more than usual of colour in her radiant and sunny face because of the approach of the two women. It was a lingering kind of look that he sent after her; and then he, too, turned and went on his way —cursing the parson.

CHAPTER XII.

A VISITOR.

Master Leofric Hope, on leaving Judith, returned to the farm, but not to the solitude that had awakened her commiseration. When he entered his room, which was at the back of the house, and facing the southern horizon (that alone showed some streaks of sunlight on this gloomy day) he found a stranger there —and a stranger who had evidently some notion of making himself comfortable, for he had opened the window, was now sitting on the sill, and had just begun to smoke his pipe. His hat, his sword, and sword-belt he had flung on to the table.

For a second the proper owner of the apartment knew not who this new tenant might be—he being dark against the light; but the next second he had recognised him, and that with no good grace.

'What the devil brings you here?' said he, sulkily.

'A hearty welcome, truly,' the other said, with much complacency. 'After all my vexation in finding thee out! A goodly welcome for an old friend! But no matter, Jack—come, hast naught to offer one to drink? I have ridden from Banbury this morning, and the plague take me if I had not enough trouble ere I found the hare in her form. But 'tis snug—'tis snug. The place likes me, though I thought by now you might have company, and entered with care. Come, man, be more friendly! Will you not ask me to sit? Must I call the landlady—or the farmer's wife—myself, and beg for a cup of something on so hot a day? Where be your manners, Gentleman Jack?'

'What the devil brings you into Warwickshire?' the other repeated, as he threw his hat on the table and dropped into a chair, and stretched out his legs without a further look at his companion.

'Nay, 'tis what the devil keeps thee here?—that is the graver question—though I know the answer right well. Come, Jack, be reason-

able! 'Tis for thy good I have sought thee out. What, man, would you ruin us both?—for I tell thee the end is pressing and near.'

Seeing that his unwilling host would not even turn his eyes towards him he got down from the window-sill and came along to the table and took a chair. He was a short, stout young man, of puffy face and red hair, good-natured in look, but with a curious glaze in his light blue-gray eyes that told of the tavern and himself being pretty close companions. His dress had some show of ornament about it, though it was rather travel-stained and shabby; he wore jewelled rings in his ears; and the handkerchief which he somewhat ostentatiously displayed, if the linen might have been whiter, was elaborately embroidered with thread of Coventry blue. For the rest, he spoke pleasantly and good-humouredly, and was obviously determined not to take offence at his anything but hearty reception.

'Hoy-day,' said he, with a laugh, 'what a pother I had with the good dame here, that would scarce let me come in! For how knew I what name you might be dancing

your latest galliard in?—not plain Jack Orridge, I'll be bound! What is't—your worship?—or your lordship, perchance?—nay, but a lord would look best in the eyes of a daughter of Will Shakespeare, that loveth to have trumpets and drums going, and dukes and princes stalking across his boards. But 'fore Heaven, now, Jack,' said he, interrupting himself, and sending an appealing look round the room, 'have you naught to drink in the house? Came you ever to my lodging and found such scurvy entertainment?'

The reluctant host left the apartment for a second or two, and presently returned, followed by the farmer's wife, who placed on the table a jug of small beer and some bread and cheese. The bread and cheese did not find much favour with the new comer; but he drank a large horn of the beer, and took to his pipe again.

'Come, Jack, be friendly,' said he, ''tis for thine own good I have sought thee out.'

'I would you would mind your own business,' the other said, with a sullen frown remaining on his face.

'Mine and yours are one, as I take it,

good coz,' his companion said, coolly, and then he added, in a more friendly way: 'Come, come, man, you know we must sink or swim together. And sinking it will be, if you give not up this madcap chase. Nay, you carry the jest too far, *mon ami*. 'Twas a right merry tale at the beginning — the sham wizard, and your coquetting with Will Shakespeare's daughter to while away the time; 'twas a prank would make them roar at the Cranes in the Vintry; and right well done, I doubt not—for, in truth, if you were not such a gallant gentleman you might win to a place in the theatres as well as any of them; but to come back here again—to hide yourself away again—and when I tell you they will no longer forbear, but will clap thee into gaol if they have not their uttermost penny —why, 'tis pure moonshine madness to risk so much for a jest!'

'I tell thee 'tis no jest at all!' the other said, angrily. 'In Heaven's name, what brought you here?'

'Am I to have no care of myself, then, that am your surety, and have their threats from hour to hour?'

He laughed in a stupid kind of way, and filled out some more beer and drank it off thirstily.

'We had a merry night, last night, at Banbury,' said he, 'I must pluck a hair of the same wolf to-day. And what say you? No jest? Nay, you look sour enough to be virtuous, by my life, or to get into a pulpit and preach a sermon against fayles and tick-tack, as wiles of the devil. No jest? Have you been overthrown at last—by a country wench? Must you take to the plough, and grow turnips? Why, I should as soon expect to see Gentleman Jack consort with the Finsbury archers, or go a-ducking to Islington ponds! Our Gentleman Jack a farmer! The price of wheat, goodman Dickon?—how fatten your pigs?—will the fine weather last, think you? Have done with this foolery, man! If all comes to the worst, 'twere better we should take to the road, you and I, and snip a purse when chance might serve.'

'You?' said his companion, with only half-concealed contempt. 'The first click of a pistol would find you behind a hedge.'

'Why, old lad,' said the other (who did

not seem to have heard that remark, during his pouring out of another hornful of beer), 'I know you better than you know yourself. This time, you say, 'tis serious—ay, but how many times before hast thou said the same? And ever the wench is the fairest of her kind, and a queen! For how long?—a fortnight!—perchance three weeks. O, the wonder of her! And 'tis all a love-worship; and the praising of her hands and her ankles; and Tom Morley's ditty about a lover and his lass

> "*That through the green corn-fields did pass*
> *In the pretty Spring-time,*
> *Ring-a-ding-ding!*"

Ay, for a fortnight; and then Gentleman Jack discovers that some wench of the Bank-side hath brighter eyes and freer favours than the country beauty, and you hear no more of him until he has ne'er a penny left, and comes begging his friends to be surety for him, or to write to his grandam at Oxford, saying how virtuous a youth he is, and in how sad a plight. Good Lord, that were an end!—should you have to go back to the old dame at last, and become tapster—no more acting

of your lordship and worship — what ho, there! thou lazy knave, a flask of Rhenish, and put speed into thy rascal heels!'

The cloud on his companion's face had been darkening.

'Peace, drunken fool!' he muttered—but between his teeth, for he did not seem to wish to anger this stranger.

'Come, come, man,' the other said, jovially, 'unwitch thee—unwitch thee! Fetch back thy senses. What?—wouldst thou become a jest and byword for every tavern table between the Temple and the Tower? Nay, I cannot believe it of thee, Jack. Serious? Ay, as thou hast been twenty times before. Lord, what a foot and ankle!—and she the queen o' the world—the rose and crown and queen o' the world!—and the sighing o' moonlight nights:

"Mignonne, tant je vous aime,
Mais vous ne m'aimez pas"

—and we are all to be virtuous and live cleanly for the rest of our lives; but the next time you see Gentleman Jack, lo you now! —'tis at the Bear-house; his pockets lined with angels wrung from old Ely of Queen-

hithe; and as for his company—Lord, Lord! And as it hath been before, so 'twill be again, as said Solomon the wise man; only that this time—mark you now, Jack—this time it were well if you came to your senses at once; for I tell thee that Ely and the rest of them have lost all patience, and they know this much of thy Stratford doings, that if they cannot exactly name thy whereabout, they can come within a stone's-cast of thee. And if I come to warn thee—as is the office of a true friend and an old companion — why shouldst thou sit there with a sulky face, man? Did I ever treat thee so in Fetter Lane?'

While he had been talking, a savoury odour had begun to steal into the apartment; and presently the farmer's wife appeared and proceeded to spread the cloth for dinner. Her lodger had given no orders, but she had taken his return as sufficient signal; and naturally she assumed that his friend would dine with him. Accordingly, in due course there was placed on the board a smoking dish of cow-heel and bacon, with abundance of greens and other garnishings; and as this fare

seemed more tempting to the newcomer than the bread and cheese, he needed no pressing to draw in his chair to the table. It was not a sumptuous feast, but it had a beneficial effect on both of them—sobering the one, and rendering the other somewhat more placable. Master Leofric Hope—as he had styled himself—was still in a measure taciturn; but his guest—whose name, it appeared, was Francis Lloyd—had ceased his uncomfortable banter; and indeed all his talk now was of the charms and wealth of a certain widow who lived in a house near to Gray's Inn, on the road to Hampstead. He had been asked to dine with the widow; and he gave a magniloquent description of the state she kept — of her serving-men, and her furniture, and her plate, and the manner in which she entertained her friends.

'And why was I,' said he,—'why was poor Frank Lloyd—that could scarce get the wherewithal to pay for a rose for his ear—why was he picked out for so great a favour? Why, but that he was known to be a friend of handsome Jack Orridge. "Where be your friend, Master Orridge, now?" she says, for

she hath sometimes a country trick in her speech, hath the good lady. "Business, Madam—affairs of great import," I say to her, "keep him still in the country." Would I tell her the wolves were waiting to rend you, should you be heard of anywhere within London city? "Handsome Jack, they call him, is't not so?" says she. Would I tell her thou wert called "Gentleman Jack," as if thou hadst but slim right to the title? Then says she to one of the serving-men: "Fill the gentleman's cup." Lord, Jack, what a sherris that was!—'twas meat and drink—a thing to put marrow in your bones—cool and clear it was, and rich withal—cool on the tongue and warm in the stomach—'fore Heaven, Jack, if thou hast not ever a cup of that wine ready for me when I visit thee I will say thou hast no more gratitude than a toad. And then says she to all the company (raising her glass the while), "Absent friends!"—but she nods and smiles to me, as one would say: "We know whom we mean; we know." Lord, that sherris, Jack!—I have the taste of it in my mouth now; I dream o' nights there is a jug of it by me.'

'Dreaming or waking, there is little else in thy head,' said the other, 'nor in thy stomach either.'

'Is't a bargain, Jack?' he said, looking up from his plate, and regarding his companion with a fixed look.

'A bargain?'

'I tell thee 'tis the only thing will save us now,' this Frank Lloyd said, with more seriousness than he had hitherto shown. 'Heavens, man, you must cease this idling; I tell thee they are not in the frame for further delay. 'Tis the Widow Becket or the King's highway—one or t'other—if you would remain a free man; and as for the highway, why, 'tis an uncertain trade, and I know that Gentleman Jack is no lover of broken heads. What else would you? Live on in a hole like this? Nay, but they would not suffer you; I tell you they are ready to hunt you out at this present moment. Go beyond seas? Ay, and forsake the merry nights at the Cranes and the Silver Hind? When thy old grandam is driven out of all patience, and will not even forth with a couple of shillings to buy you wine and radish for

your breakfast, 'tis a bad case: wouldst go down to Oxford and become tapster?—Gentleman Jack, that all of them think hath fine fat acres in the west country, and a line of ancestors reaching back to Noah the sailor or Adam gardener. Come, man, unwitch thee! Collect thy senses. If this sorry jest of thine be growing serious—and I confess I had some thought of it, when you would draw on Harry Condell for the mere naming of the wench's name—then o' Heaven's sake come away and get thee out of such foolery! I tell thee thou art getting near an end—o' one way or another; and wouldst thou have me broken, too, that have ever helped thee and shared my last penny with thee?'

'Broken?' said his friend, with a laugh. 'If there be any in the country more broken than you and I are at this moment, Frank, I wish them luck of their fortunes. But still there is somewhat for you. You have not pawned those jewels in your ears yet. And your horse—you rode hither, said you not?—well, I trust it is a goodly beast, for it may have to save thee from starvation ere long.'

'Nay, ask me not how I came by the creature,' said he, 'but 'tis not mine, I assure ye.'

'Whose, then?'

Master Frank Lloyd shrugged his shoulders.

'If you cannot guess my errand,' said he, 'you cannot guess who equipped me.'

'Nay,' said his friend, who was now in a much better humour, 'read me no riddles, Frank; I would fain know who knew thee so little as to lend thee a horse and see thee ride forth with it. Who was't, Frank?'

His companion looked up and regarded him.

'The Widow Becket,' he answered, coolly.

'What?' said the other, laughing. 'Art thou so far in the good dame's graces, and yet would have me to go to London and marry her?'

''Tis no laughing matter, Master Jack, as you may find out ere long,' the other said. 'The good lady lent me the horse, 'tis true; else how could I have come all the way into Warwickshire?—ay, and lent me an angel or two, to appease the villain landlords. I tell thee she is as bountiful as the day. Lord,

what a house!—I'll take my oath that Master butler hath a good fat capon and a bottle of claret each evening for his supper—if he have not, his face belieth him. And think you she would be niggard with Handsome Jack? Nay, but a gentleman must have his friends; ay, and his suppers at the tavern when the play is over; and store of pieces in his purse to make you good company. Why, man, thy fame would spread through the Blackfriars, I warrant you; where is the hostess that would not simper and ogle and court'sy to Gentleman Jack, when that he came among them slapping the purse in his pouch?'

''Tis a fair picture,' his friend said. 'Thy wits have been sharpened by thy long ride, Frank. And think you the buxom widow would consent were one to make bold and ask her? Nay, nay; 'tis thy dire need hath driven thee to this excess of fancy.'

For answer Master Lloyd proceeded to bring forth a small box which he opened, and took therefrom a finger-ring. It was a man's ring, of massive setting; the stone of a deep blood-red, and graven with an intaglio

of a Roman bust. He pushed it across the table.

'The horse was lent,' said he, darkly. 'That—if it please you—you may keep and wear.'

'What mean you?' Leofric Hope said, in some surprise.

'"I name no thing, and I mean no thing,"' said he, quoting a phrase from a popular ballad. 'If you understand not, 'tis a pity. I may not speak more plainly. But bethink you that poor Frank Lloyd was not likely to have the means of purchasing thee such a pretty toy—much as he would like to please his old friend. Nay, canst thou not see, Jack? 'Tis a message, man! More I may not say. Take it and wear it, good lad; and come back boldly to London, and we will face the harpies, and live as free men, ere a fortnight be over. What?—must I speak? Nay, an' you understand not, I will tell no more.'

He understood well enough, and he sate for a second or two moodily regarding the ring; but he did not take it up. Then he rose from the table and began to walk up and down the room.

'Frank,' said he, 'couldst thou but see this wench——'

'Nay, nay, spare me the catalogue,' his friend answered, quickly. 'I heard thee declare that Ben Jonson had no words to say how fair she was: would you better his description and overmaster him? And fair or not fair 'tis all the same with thee; any petticoat can bewitch thee out of thy senses: Black Almaine or New Almaine may be the tune, but 'tis ever the same dance; and such a heaving of sighs and despair!—

> "*Thy gown was of the grassy green,*
> *Thy sleeves of satin hanging by;*
> *Which made thee be our harvest queen—*
> *And yet thou wouldst not love me.*"

'Tis a pleasant pastime, friend Jack; but there comes an end. I know not which be the worse, wenches or usurers, for landing a poor lad in gaol; but both together, Jack—and that is thy case—they are not like to let thee escape. 'Tis not to every one in such a plight there cometh a talisman like that pretty toy there—beshrew me, what a thing it is in this world to have a goodly presence!'

He now rose from the table and went to the door, and called aloud for some one to bring him a light. When that was brought, and his pipe set going, he sate him down on the bench by the empty fireplace, for the seat seemed comfortable; and there he smoked with much content, while his friend continued to pace up and down the apartment meditating over his own situation, and seemingly not over well pleased with the survey.

Presently something in one of the pigeonholes over the fireplace attracted the attention of the visitor; and, having nothing better to do (for he would leave his friend time to ponder over what he had said), he rose and pulled forth a little bundle of sheets of paper that opened in his hand as he sate down again.

'What's this, Jack?' said he. 'Hast become playwright?—surely all of this preachment is not in praise of the fair damsel's eyebrows?'

His friend turned round, saw what he had got hold of, and laughed.

'That, now,' said he, 'were something to

puzzle the wits with, were one free to go to London. I had some such jest in mind; but perchance 'twas more of idleness that made me copy out the play.'

''Tis not yours, then? Whose?' said Master Frank Lloyd, looking over the pages with some curiosity.

'Whose? Why, 'tis by one Will Shakespeare, that you may have heard of. Would it not puzzle them, Frank? Were it not a good jest, now, to lay it before some learned critic and ask his worship's opinion? Or to read it at the Silver Hind as of thy writing? Would not Dame Marjory weep with joy? Out upon the Mermaid!—have we not poets of our own?'

He had drawn near, and was looking down at the sheets that his friend was examining.

'I tell thee this, Jack,' the latter said, in his cool way, 'there is more than a jest to be got out of a play by Will Shakespeare. Would not the booksellers give us the price of a couple of nags for it if we were pressed so far?'

'Mind thine own business, fool!' was the

angry rejoinder; and ere he knew what had happened his hands were empty.

And at that same moment, away over there in Stratford town, Judith was in the garden, trying to teach little Bess Hall to dance, and merrily laughing the while. And when the dancing lesson was over, she would try a singing lesson; and now the child was on Judith's shoulder, and had hold of her bonny sun-brown curls.

'Well done, Bess; well done! Now again—

> "*The hunt is up—the hunt is up—*
> *Awake, my lady dear!*
> *Oh, a morn in Spring is the sweetest thing*
> *Cometh in all the year!*"

Well done, indeed! Will not my father praise thee, lass; and what more wouldst thou have for all thy pains?'

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